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MARGARET PERCIVAL

BY THE

AUTHOR OF "AMY HERBERT."

NEW EDITION.

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TALES BY THE AUTHOR OF "AMY HERBERT."

VOL. VIII.

MARGARET PERCIVAL.

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PREFACE.

THE following tale has been open to so much misconception, that the writer, in bringing out a cheap edition, is anxious to offer a few words in explanation of its object. It was written with the view, not of entering into the Romish controversy, but of setting before young persons the difficulty of engaging in such a controversy, and the danger of allowing our affections to be engrossed by persons who, however excellent in other respects, are likely to lead us into errors of faith. The individuals represented as Roman Catholics were purposely portrayed in an amiable light, in order to avoid any appearance of prejudice or harsh judgment.

The writer being herself *heartily* convinced of the impregnable foundation on which the Church of England rests, was not afraid to acknowledge the outward attractions of Rome, or the virtues of members of that communion; and the idea that her intention could be misunderstood never presented itself, as a point to be guarded, until the book was published.

After the lapse of so many years, and when time alone must have brought an answer to the erroneous suspicions cir-

culated at the period of the first publication of "Margaret Percival," it may seem unnecessary to say more; yet the writer cannot but feel a satisfaction in taking this opportunity of expressing publicly the deep prayer of her heart—that God would grant her grace to live and die a devoted member of the English Church.

BONCHURCH:
Feast of St. John the Baptist, 1858.

MARGARET PERCIVAL.

CHAPTER I.

"MARGARET, I came first, please look at my exercise," said a little fretful voice, whilst a slate was thrust forward at the imminent risk of knocking down a well-filled, but rather unsteady, inkstand.

"Hush, Grace, be quiet; you know I can't attend to two at once. This sum is quite wrong, Harriet; very careless!—go to your room, and do it again."

The command was given sharply, and Harriet Percival, a meek child of about eleven years of age, who had been vainly striving for the last half-hour to understand what was meant by "multiplying the second and third terms together, and dividing the product by the first," retired in despair, a few tears falling upon her slate as she left the apartment, and effacing the only figures which did not require correction.

"Now, Grace, let me see," continued Margaret, and she breathed a sigh of relief at the thought of having escaped, for the present, from the mysteries of the "Rule of Three." Grace leant over the back of her sister's chair, and began playing with her watch-chain; but a sudden jerk, and an exclamation of impatience, recalled her to order.

"Look, just look, Margaret, Philip has made such a great blot," she whispered.

Margaret threw down the exercise, and going up to the child took the pen out of his hand, and signed to him to go into the corner. But Philip had a will of his own—a very strong one—and on the present occasion it urged him to remain where he was. Margaret ordered, but equally in vain; she even proceeded to take hold of him, but her hand was delicate, and her strength

slight. Philip was capable of making a very fair resistance, and a passionate burst of tears with some desperate struggles succeeded, during which Grace amused herself by entangling her sister's netting silk, and scribbling on the cover of an atlas. Margaret felt herself acting a very undignified part, but she had no choice; and, besides, her temper was roused, and she was resolved to gain the victory. Philip was at length captured; his arms were put behind him, and tied together, and he was lifted up on a chair in the middle of the room as a public warning.

Margaret had not even time to smooth her collar and arrange her hair, and her cheek was still flushed and her eye sparkling, when the door opened, and a tall, very elegant girl, apparently about nineteen, entered. That they were sisters might be seen at once; the family likeness was strongly marked; but Margaret's figure was scarcely of the middle height, and her dark complexion and rather foreign-looking features formed a strong contrast to Agatha's transparent skin, and fair hair. It was strange after a minute's comparison that any resemblance should be traced between them; but there was an expression—a curl of the lip, a turn of the head, which could not be mistaken. It was the Percival manner, the stock upon which all other differences had been grafted.

"Why are the children so noisy?" inquired Agatha, in a reproachful tone; "really, Margaret, you ought to know better than to allow them to be so troublesome."

Margaret looked up sarcastically. "Perhaps," she said, "you will do me the favour to assist in keeping order."

It did not appear that the observation was heeded, for Agatha put up her eye-glass, and gazed round the room in search of a book; and when it was found, took it and retired without offering another word. A cloud passed over Margaret's brow; but it was not from ill-temper: it was from weariness and self-discontent. There was a book lying before her, and, though Grace's exercise remained uncorrected, and Philip, in a subdued voice, asked to be forgiven, she threw herself back in her chair, and, yielding to a train of thought, suggested by the words which met her eye, gave herself up to the luxury of fancy. It required but a short reverie, the exercise of a faculty constantly exerted, and Margaret was in a new world. How different was it from the world in which she lived! How pure and noble even in its scenes of trial—how raised above the reach of petty sufferings—how blest in its recollections of the past—how bright in its anticipations of the future! It was earth—but earth exalted and refined; once more a garden

of Eden, a paradise where the peacefulness of nature was but the type of the harmony of the spirits who inhabited it. Margaret's heart thrilled within her—she had not yet reached the age when hope and imagination are crushed by life's weight of care; she knew that it was a dream, but it was her refreshment, her repose, and she felt no hesitation in indulging it. Harriet's voice was the first to break the spell.

"Margaret, I have tried so very much; it will not come right."

Margaret's exclamation was little suited to the ideal world in which she had been dwelling. The little girl's slate was hastily scanned; a long line was drawn across it nearly from the commencement of the sum; and, without further explanation, she was again sent to her room.

"Shall we put the books away now, Margaret?" said Grace, covering the tangled netting silk with her hand.

"Yes, directly. Be quick; the servants will be here to lay the cloth in a minute. Philip, you may get down; I shall give you a black mark."

Margaret wrote a large, awful looking B against Philip's name in the conduct book, and then, untying his hands, bade him go upstairs and make himself tidy before dinner.

Grace busied herself in clearing the table, and in so doing left the silk open to inspection.

"Oh, Grace! you naughty, very naughty child!" was Margaret's exclamation, as she discovered the difficulty in which the little girl's mischievous habits had placed her. "I shall speak to mamma, really I shall: I never knew any one so tiresome."

Grace did not appear much overcome by this threat; she was her mother's favourite, and she knew that she could easily make her story good against anything which her sister might tell. "Mamma is coming," she said archly, and in a tone of defiance.

Margaret gathered up the silk, and, holding it up to view, addressed her mother, when she came in, with a series of complaints. Not in the affair of the silk merely was Grace in fault, but in everything. Exercise, reading, lessons, music, all had been badly done; she was more trouble than all the rest; she was trying, quite trying.

"Hush, hush, my dear, command yourself, you are so excitable. What is it, Grace? what have you been doing?"

Grace threw her arm coaxingly around her mamma, and pointed to the silk. "It is only that, mamma. But you know she is cross."

"Well, don't be teasing, there's a good child. Margaret, my

love, you must learn to be more forbearing: you can't expect such little things to be perfect."

Mrs. Percival delivered the injunction in an oracular tone, and when Margaret disappeared, hopeless of justice, and vexed with herself for having attempted to obtain it, she kissed Grace and called her a darling, and without taking any more notice of what had passed, rang the bell to reprimand the servant for being ten minutes after time in preparing the children's dinner.

Mrs. Percival was emphatically a good manager; good in the worldly sense of the term. She was the wife of a physician, high in practice, and with an income yearly increasing. She was a lady by birth and education; and she was a lady also in mind, as far as understanding and scrupulously acting upon the acknowledged tenets and practices of the world could constitute her such. She never omitted a civility, or was guilty of any breach of etiquette. She dressed always in good taste; her house was furnished elegantly, without pretension; her children were neat and interesting; her servants were patterns of punctuality; or, if they were not, they were discharged. She was busy, constantly; morning, noon, and night, her eye was on the watch to perceive and correct defects; and if this perpetual interference partook of the nature of a petty tyranny, it was a fault known only to her family. She was too well bred to obtrude her domestic grievances upon her friends; and, no one seeing anything of the machinery by which so perfect an establishment was regulated, Mrs. Percival's household was universally held up as a pattern for imitation in the town of Staunton and the adjoining neighbourhood. And Mrs. Percival was not an unamiable woman; she had a kind heart, and never turned aside from any cases of distress. She did not trouble herself to seek them out; that was the duty of the rector and the curate, and the district visitors; and when they were found, she did not exert herself to make personal inquiries; but her purse was always open to those who applied to her for relief. She was liberal by nature and habit, and to give was far more easy than to refuse. Of these points of character Mrs. Percival was fully conscious; yet she was not what would be called conceited. She did not in general over estimate her judgment and common sense, nor believe herself a pattern of benevolence. Her self-confidence was merely that which enabled her to decide quickly for her own family, and authoritatively for others. But there was one thing on which she prided herself—a plan for the education of her children. She had persuaded her husband to lavish upon her eldest girl every advantage which the demands of modern refine-

ment might require. Agatha was sent to an expensive school, and allowed masters for drawing, and singing, the piano, the harp, French, Italian, German, mathematics: there was nothing that any one of her acquaintance had ever learnt which Agatha Percival did not learn also. It was an outlay at first, but it was to be amply repaid in the end; for when her education was finished, Agatha was to return to be the instructress of the remainder of the family.

No scheme could have been devised more prudently; but, unhappily for its success, Mrs. Percival never made any inquiries into that very essential requisite, Agatha's own qualifications. Agatha had learnt, and of course she must be able to teach. And Agatha had indeed learnt, and not superficially. She was well read, a fair linguist, an excellent musician; her good natural abilities had been carefully cultivated, and at eighteen she was considered not merely elegant and beautiful, but a very superior person in mind. Mrs. Percival was proud of her daughter, and her husband was still more so. He was engrossed in his profession, engaged without a single day of entire rest; and, with such constant and harassing occupations, his life would have been irksome beyond endurance but for his delight in his family. Although there were few hours in which he could enjoy their society, and those liable to frequent interruption, yet the stolen intervals were full of refreshment to his wearied spirits; and to hear that Agatha had been called lovely, or that Philip had been thought a fine little fellow, or indeed that praise had been bestowed upon any one of his children, gave him strength to endure all fatigue, whether mental or physical. He agreed entirely with his wife in believing that Agatha was more than competent to take charge of her brothers and sisters. Margaret, who was then seventeen, would, it was imagined, require but little attention. She was uncommonly clever, and had profited wonderfully by country masters; and a little advice, a few hints, would be all that could be necessary for her. As to her mind, Margaret had managed, no one knew how, to read, and think, and study by herself, so as almost to rival Agatha in some persons' opinion. As a child her mother had taught her, as she did all the rest; but from the age of fourteen, Margaret had outstripped her teacher. She read history and made notes; she dived into the mysteries of Dante, and spent her leisure hours in mastering the difficulties of German; she was even occasionally seen with a Latin Testament in her hand; and though her father laughed at her, and called her a smatterer and a blue-stocking, and her mother wished

that she would pay a little more attention to work; still, both were in their hearts well pleased. Margaret was no common character, and it was possible, that she might some day excite as much admiration by her learning, as Agatha did by her beauty and showy accomplishments. Agatha's instructions, therefore, would not be required by her; and there were two sons, one in the army and another at Eton, who were equally beyond the need of home-tuition; but Harriet, and Grace, and Philip, and little Juliet, when she was old enough, might be expected to make rapid progress. Agatha heard of the plan, and offered no objection to it. It was not worth while when it was only an idea, and might, like many other of her mother's projects, come to nothing; but when, on the morning after she had finally left school, Mrs. Percival addressed her with—

"Well! my dear, when do you intend to begin? I suppose you will require about a week to make arrangements, and then you can take possession of the school-room"—her declaration, that she had neither the power nor the inclination to undertake the office assigned her, was made so decidedly, that even Mrs. Percival's will was obliged in a degree to give way. She insisted, entreated, threatened; but she did not know the character with which she had to deal. Agatha Percival was weak and vacillating in principle, but obstinate to immovability. She had quickness of intellect, but no depth; her temper was considered good, because her feelings were not easily roused; and the system under which she had been educated had rendered her selfish, by teaching her that she was to be the centre of admiration. Hers was a disposition which nothing but high religious motives would ever have stimulated to real energy and usefulness, and, instead of religion, she had heard only of the world,—what would be said and thought—what was considered etiquette—what was the general fashion;—she had not an idea beyond. The vain dream of this mortal life was to her a vivid reality; and the one object of her existence, for which every other consideration was to be sacrificed, was a fortunate marriage, including, of course, a handsome house and establishment of servants and carriages; rank superior to her own; money to gratify every wish; and, as the last desideratum, a husband. With such views it was hopeless to talk to her of the value of time, the necessity of employing her talents, the advantages that might accrue to herself, as well as to her sisters, from the plan proposed. To spend her days in the school-room would be banishment from all that could give her happiness; her home would be a prison, her life a burden;—she

was excited even to eloquence upon the occasion, and Mrs. Percival shrank back, alarmed at the unexpected torrent of words she had encountered from her usually quiet daughter. In great disappointment she consented to waive the question till Dr. Percival's return home, and Agatha resumed her book as placidly as if nothing had occurred; whilst Mrs. Percival, vexed and indignant, proceeded to the school-room, to fulfil herself the task which she had so unsuccessfully endeavoured to devolve upon another. Dr. Percival's surprise at the refusal was not as great as his wife's. The project had never made much impression upon him; and as long as his children were educated, he cared little by whom.

"Well, my love, well!" he said, stroking his chin complacently, when Mrs. Percival had finished her recital of the morning scene; "I have no doubt you are right; you must know best; a great pity, certainly, it is, but natural,—very natural. Agatha doesn't like teaching, so don't a great many people."

"But, my dear Dr. Percival, after her education,—after the sums of money we have spent,—so ungrateful it is!"

"He—hem; no, not ungrateful exactly; she doesn't like it, that's all."

"Not like it!—to be sure she does not; but that is what I say, that Agatha is extremely ungrateful."

"Harsh, my dear; you should remember what you felt when you were young."

"Yes, indeed, I do remember what I felt. I was made to do everything in the house—a perfect slave. Agatha's life, if she had twenty children to teach, would be Paradise to what mine was."

"Well, it may be; we will hope it will be so."

Dr. Percival poured out a glass of wine, held it up to the light, sipped it with evident zest, and then threw himself back in his chair, preparatory to a nap.

"Now, Dr. Percival, indeed you must listen. What are we to do? Are you prepared to pay a hundred a year to a governess,—and masters besides?"

Dr. Percival roused himself and smiled; and the smile upset the remainder of his wife's equanimity.

"Really you are most provoking; you tell me every day that we are living too expensively, that you must put by something for your girls; and yet, you would give a hundred a year to suit Agatha's whims, and only smile about it."

"You mistake me, my dear; I would not give a hundred a year."

"Then what would you give? — what would you do? How are we to manage?"

"As we have done before," was the quiet answer.

"But, indeed, I assure you, Dr. Percival, this is not a subject upon which you are competent to judge. How can I possibly continue to bear such a burden? I have not been at all well lately, I am not in the least equal to it; and, you know, when we parted with the nursery governess, and sent Agatha to the Miss Robinsons', it was with the full belief that I should only be obliged to teach the younger ones for two or three years. It is hard upon me, — very hard."

Mrs. Percival's temper was in general good, and her husband was surprised at the tone in which the last words were said.

"Julia, my dear, you vex me; no one dreams of being hard upon you; but as to giving an additional hundred a year to a governess, it is out of the question. You know Craven costs me three hundred at least, and there is George nearly ready to go to college; and if anything were to happen to me, what is to become of you all? — you must think of this!"

"But I do think of it," exclaimed Mrs. Percival, fretted beyond patience by her husband's seeming dulness of comprehension; "all that I want is, for you to think of it too, and to insist upon Agatha's doing her duty."

"Nay, my dear, if Agatha has such a disinclination, it will not be her duty; she will not be fitted for it."

Mrs. Percival sighed, not in grief, but in irritation. She bit her lip, and walked quickly up and down the room. Dr. Percival was not as obtuse as he appeared; he was revolving in his own mind some means of obviating the difficulty; and, after a silence of considerable length, during which Mrs. Percival's step had quickened, and a few ejaculations had escaped her, he said —

"You have another daughter, my dear; why cannot she be the governess?"

"Nonsense! absurdity!" were the first expressions which rose in Mrs. Percival's mind, but they were not uttered. She had a peculiar dislike to anything approaching to a matrimonial quarrel, and was aware that she had during the last quarter of an hour been nearly on the brink of one. Dr. Percival repeated his question, adding —

"Margaret is seventeen, I think."

"Yes, within a month; she is much too young."

"Only a year younger than Agatha, and she has the power."

"Yes," and Mrs. Percival's countenance brightened; "no one

can doubt that. Signor Contarino showed me some Italian poetry of hers yesterday, which he said was wonderful, and he must be a good judge."

"Of course; and she spoke French fluently when Monsieur de Roget dined here; and her music and drawing are very good, though not equal to Agatha's."

"Not quite," said Mrs. Percival; "but we must recollect the year's difference."

"She is extremely young, certainly; but she is very steady."

"Well, then, I suppose it is settled; so I shall have my nap." And Dr. Percival once more composed himself in his chair.

"Settled, my dear!" exclaimed his wife; "no, it is not at all settled. I am not in the least sure that it will do; and Margaret may be like Agatha."

"Ask her — ask her," was muttered drowsily; and Mrs. Percival, seeing no hope of continuing the conversation, retired to her chamber; and, after a quarter of an hour's deliberation, sent for Margaret. Margaret was lost in the delights of Schiller's Wallenstein, and not at all inclined to put aside her book for the prospect of a business conversation with her mother; most probably upon some omission or commission, of which, in her abstraction of mind, she had been guilty. But Mrs. Percival's face was not critical as usual; she was rather in the conciliatory mood, and making Margaret sit down, she addressed her with —

"Margaret, my love, your papa and I have been talking; we think you are growing rather too old for the school-room, and you have done very well lately, — extremely well. Signor Contarino assures me that he is excessively pleased with you."

Margaret could scarcely believe that she heard correctly, — so new a thing was it for her to be praised.

"Agatha's return I thought would have made a difference to me," continued Mrs. Percival; "but she has disappointed me. I am very vexed with her indeed. She is acting an ungrateful part. However, your father does not think it right to urge the point; so we must let it rest. Agatha does not choose to teach the younger ones, and we have been considering — do you think it possible, my dear Margaret, that you could undertake to do it?"

"Me, mamma! me! you are laughing."

"No, my love, I am not. You are young, I know; but, as I said before, you have done very well lately; and I think you must be competent. History, and geography, and all those things, I can judge myself that you understand; and French too; and I dare say you could help the little ones in music and drawing:

they don't require much yet, and by the time they do you will have improved yourself."

Margaret did not know what to reply. Conceited she was not, — she was too really clever, too conscious of the extent of knowledge which lay before her, and which she could never hope even to attempt to grasp. Perhaps, she had not enough self-confidence, for she had been very little accustomed to approbation, from being generally placed in comparison with Agatha; and her estimation of her own powers amounted to a certainty that she was a very bad workwoman, and not at all useful in exercising her fingers, even in the tying up of a parcel; and a notion that it was rather easier to her to remember what she had read, and more agreeable to study the grammar of a foreign language, than it was to the generality of her acquaintances. Mrs. Percival waited with some degree of anxiety. Margaret's refusal would throw her again into difficulty, but she was not prepared for the answer:

"Mamma, may I have time to think about it?"

It seemed unlike Margaret; rapid and energetic, and so frequently acting upon impulse. But Margaret's mind was of a nature which Mrs. Percival could not comprehend. She was quick in expressing her opinions, merely because they were seldom to be followed by action; and her impulses, the result of a highly imaginative temperament, were, in the same way, often unguarded, simply because she had never been required to check them by considering that they involved consequences of importance. This was the first occasion on which she had had to judge for herself; and her good sense, a quality which few as yet had given her credit for possessing, urged her at once to pause before she decided. Mrs. Percival, though impatient, could not find fault with the delay; and Margaret spent the next half-hour in considering the reasons for and against the proposed plan, more deeply and thoughtfully than would have been done by many of mature age. The result was in accordance with her mother's wishes. Margaret consented to take Agatha's duty upon herself; and Mrs. Percival, delighted at the arrangement, believed that it was entirely owing to herself; whilst her husband, saved from the labour of thinking, and desiring domestic peace at any price, felt that he could scarcely lavish sufficient caresses upon his daughter for having spared him the renewal of the afternoon's conversation. Agatha, too, was grateful; she saw that her sister had saved her not merely from a wearying occupation, but from an altercation with her parents of a serious nature; and, in the good humour of the

moment, she willingly promised to lend her occasional assistance, though she did not choose to take the entire responsibility. It was a peaceful, happy household, and Margaret was the happiest of all. Her Dante and Schiller were thrown aside; her drawings were put away, almost without regret. She had but one thought —that of setting an example of perfect education. But just emerged from childhood, she had a vivid remembrance of all that she had endured, and a clear perception of the mistakes by which she had been injured. She had particularly watched, within the last two years, the fatal fruits of her mother's system of management. Her constant interference and complaints; her irritable manner, when she was not really angry; her uninteresting, matter-of-fact style of instruction; and, above all, the petty, gossiping, worldly tone which was infused into the children's minds by the conversation, or frequently by the remarks only, which were made in their presence. Margaret saw that Harriet's meekness was repelled, and her indolence overlooked; that Grace was made forward and pettish; that Philip was becoming every day more headstrong. A fault there must be somewhere,—a grievous one. Margaret did not set to work to discover where it lay, but she painted in fancy a school-room, in which the teacher was to be infallible, and the pupils were to be patterns of docility; and, setting herself to make rules, and chalk out plans of instruction, she threw the whole energy of her mind into the business before her, and entered upon the duties of her new office.

Twelve months had gone by. Margaret was eighteen, about to be introduced into society. Agatha was already the gayest of the gay,—admired by all, courted by many. Mrs. Percival was perfectly satisfied with the sensation she had caused; and Margaret was to follow,—not the same course, that could not be expected, for few were gifted like Agatha,—but one as successful in a different way. Yet Margaret herself had but few thoughts to give to the subject; she was weary, disappointed, heart-sick; her Utopian schemes had failed—her hopes were gone. Because all was not perfect at once, she had given up the endeavour to make it so; and, in consequence, the school-room was a scene of irritability and contention. She had gained no apparent influence; the children had made little progress, except in the mere routine of learning; her mother scolded, Agatha laughed; her father gave her hints upon the government of her temper, which she was painfully conscious of deserving, and her home was wretched. Society, be it what it might, could bring no cure to ills like these. And Margaret had grown in mind even as she

had grown in years. Her principles were still unsettled, and her temper was unsubdued, and her heart was wayward and discontented; but the yearnings of a slumbering spirit were awakening within her — the yearnings which can never be satisfied by aught that this world can give. It is a season of overpowering awe when the perception of the infinite realities which lie around us first dawns upon our minds; but there is a perception more overwhelming, because more hopeless, which precedes it — the sense of the nothingness of existence. Margaret had attained the one, but she had not yet reached forward to the other. Life, — its hopes and its fears, — its sorrows and its joys, — what was it? What was its end, its object? Why should there be contention and strife, ambition and rivalry, the desire of glory, and the dread of shame? One end there was to man — one event which happeneth to all: each alike must go unto one place, since "all are of the dust, and all turn to dust again." The thought was not that of scepticism. Margaret knew and believed with the belief of the understanding in a better, a "more enduring inheritance;" but she had not yet learned to connect the present and the future, to invest the meanness of this world with the splendour of heaven; and when she looked onward through the long vista of years to the world beyond the grave, it seemed to her an isolated star glittering in darkness, and not the glorious termination of that path of the just, entered upon at the commencement of our Christian course, which is "as the shining light, and shineth more and more unto the perfect day."

But it was not in Margaret's nature, nor is it often in the nature of any in the spring-time of life, to acquiesce contentedly in a state of despondency. The world without could give her no comfort, but the world within was still open to her enjoyment. Reality (or what she believed to be reality) was irksome and insipid; but imagination was exciting, and, for the moment, satisfying. Margaret created for herself a vision of beauty and perfection. In fancy she formed a home for her restless wishes, and peopled it with beings innocent, and noble, and intellectual; and in that home she dwelt, the centre of all admiration, the one object whom all were to idolise and obey. Could it excite wonder if the business of life thus became daily more distasteful, if the duties which she had engaged to fulfil were less carefully performed, or if the opiate with which she lulled her exhausted spirits only served to increase tenfold the disease?

Margaret Percival little knew her own danger; and when her mother called her a visionary, and Agatha smiled in ridicule at

her abstraction, she believed that they were speaking in ignorance; and only found the more solace in the ideal world, where no thought or word was at variance with her taste or her feelings. And her mother and sister did speak in ignorance. They had no knowledge of the malady, and judged only by the symptoms. If Margaret had been commonly attentive to her daily occupations, joined in an occasional gossip, and expressed herself delighted at the prospect of a ball, she might have indulged her imagination for ever, and no one would have found fault with her. Mrs. Percival's fear was, lest her daughter should despise the forms of society, or, by shutting herself up in seclusion, become an object of neglect. The real danger was, lest Margaret should spend her life, her short day of trial, and preparation for eternity, in a delusive fancy; and be awakened only when repentance should be of no avail, to the miserable consciousness that she had been dreaming of—not practising—goodness.

CHAPTER II.

"Mrs. St. Aubyn's carriage will be here soon, my dear Agatha; are you nearly ready?" said Mrs. Percival, as she knocked at the door of her daughter's chamber, on the day succeeding our introduction to the school-room.

"Ready, mamma, in one minute. Just tell me, please, if my shawl is straight."

Mrs. Percival willingly performed the office of a lady's maid, for it gave her an opportunity of admiring her daughter's graceful figure and elegant dress. "Really, my love, I must say you manage to make yourself look extremely nice. Where are you going to-day?"

"I don't know exactly:—into the town first, for a little shopping; and then I rather think to Ashington Court; Mrs. St. Aubyn wants to show me her brother's place."

"Ah! the poor Colonel! it has come to him too late, I am afraid; he will never enjoy it."

"But, mamma, why not? he is not so old."

"No, not above fifty; but he should have had it younger, and then he might have married and been happy."

Agatha laughed. "Well! he may marry now: stranger things have happened; and I know his sister wishes it."

"Yes, his not marrying can make no difference to her, as the property always goes in the male line."

"What a curious, disagreeable arrangement it is," said Agatha; "I am glad I am not one of the Clives: so good bye, dear mamma; there is the carriage just driving up."

Mrs. Percival went to the window. Mrs. St. Aubyn's pony phaeton was at the front door, and Mrs. St. Aubyn herself, a lady-like but vapid looking person, dressed in the perfection of the fashion, was bending forward as if impatient for Agatha's appearance.

Mrs. Percival withdrew immediately; she would not for the world have been seen. "My kind regards to Mrs. St. Aubyn, my love. I hope she will bring you home in time; remember we are engaged out to dinner."

Agatha ran downstairs, and, after a short delay, the carriage drove off. Mrs. Percival listened to the sound of the receding wheels with a smile of satisfaction. The intimacy with Mrs. St. Aubyn had been a peculiar aim of her ambition; not because either profit or amusement was to be derived from the acquaintance, but because, in the little word of Staunton, Mrs. St. Aubyn's family was more highly connected than any other; and she herself, though devoid of attractions either personal or mental, had, by a system of exclusiveness, contrived to render her society eagerly and generally coveted. The privileged circle which constituted the "haut ton" in the vicinity of Staunton was, as is the case in many country places, difficult of access; but Dr. Percival's position was, like his house, in the border country. He was of an old family, and one that was much respected: it had been the custom from time immemorial for the Percivals to visit everywhere; and even when in the commencement of his practice Dr. Percival had taken up his abode in a small house in the principal street in Staunton, his dignity as a physician, and the universal tradition of society, gave him admission to houses which would have been hermetically sealed against persons of much greater pretension. But in process of time, as his practice increased, Dr. Percival removed from the three-storied house, with its back and front parlours, and its two small drawing-rooms, one of which had been converted into a bed-room, to serve the needs of his family, into another dwelling of a very different description. The Grove was a low, red-brick edifice, having stone facings and mullioned windows, and occupying a considerable extent of ground. It was not a handsome house, and, though at some little distance from the town, commanded no view, except over some

meadow land, and the adjacent village and church of Deering. But it was a mansion of much respectability, owning a pretty shrubbery, a large garden, and a paddock; and sheltered on the north and east by some fine old elms, from which its name had been derived. The interior was of the same description; good-sized rooms, rather dark, but capable of affording much comfort, especially in the winter evenings, when the thick crimson curtains in the drawing-room were closely drawn, the sofa wheeled near the blazing fire, the table covered with books, the piano opened and the harp uncovered, and the bright lamp lighting up the oak wainscot and throwing an air of cheerfulness over the most distant corner of the apartment. When Dr. Percival removed to the Grove, his celebrity was well established; and, satisfied in the certainty, as he believed, of being able to provide comfortably for his large family, he shook off all cares except those connected with his profession, and resolved that the remainder of his life should be happy. And it was happy as far as outward prosperity could render it so; and for inward anxieties Dr. Percival had no time. It certainly was very gratifying to a father's pride to know that his children were fitted by their talents, manners, and accomplishments, for the first society in the land; and the pleasure which he derived from the invitations and the applauses that followed Agatha's introduction into the world was unbounded. Yet neither Dr. Percival nor his wife would have gone aside to seek for society beyond their natural sphere; though when it was forced upon them they entered into it willingly. And who could blame them? Who could even think of danger in such a position, except those who know the imperceptible degrees by which we slide from acquiescence in enjoyment into the craving for its possession; or by which, when in conformity with custom, we bow down before the idols of the world, rank, and wealth, and fashion, we at last pay them the homage of the heart, and suffer them to usurp that sway over our actions which belongs to God alone? In the opinion of their friends, Dr. and Mrs. Percival led innocent and useful, even virtuous, lives; and few who had witnessed the glow of maternal pride, which passed over Mrs. Percival's countenance as she pictured her daughter driving through Staunton, the chosen companion of the elegant Mrs. St. Aubyn, would have thought it necessary to ask whether a friendship, or even an intimacy, based upon the vain desire of exciting envy and admiration, could possibly be worthy the ambition of a Christian.

But Mrs. Percival's complacent equanimity was soon ruffled. A visit to the school-room roused, as it generally did, every latent

feeling of irritation. The apartment was a picture of disorder; the books which had been used were scattered on the table and the floor in wild confusion; the inkstand had been upset upon the carpet, a stool overturned was lying with its face to the ground. Grace was in the corner, Philip was sobbing, and Harriet reading out in a rapid inaudible voice to Margaret, who, reclining in her chair, was turning over the pages of a novel. Mrs. Percival's movements were energetic. Grace was called up, slightly reprimanded and forgiven; Harriet and Philip were summoned from their employments to put the room in order; and Margaret received a reproof for neglect, given before her pupils and couched in no very gentle terms. It was an unfortunate forgetfulness, or it might have been ignorance, on Mrs. Percival's part, which caused her to overlook the fact that the best mode of ensuring respect for another is by exhibiting it in our own conduct. She wished her children to look up to Margaret and obey her; but she took the most effectual steps towards rendering her authority utterly nugatory. Margaret felt this keenly. It did her harm, by inducing her to believe that nearly all the defects which she lamented in the present system of education were ascribable to her mother's interference.

"What can be done whilst Grace is so spoilt?" was an excuse constantly made to herself; and, even in cases with which Mrs. Percival had no concern, Margaret had always an apology at hand. It was hopeless to attempt anything unless she had full control. If she were to form good plans one day, they might all be destroyed the next. On this occasion, however, she had some doubt whether she was entirely blameless, and the novel was pushed aside from shame.

"This will never do, Margaret," was Mrs. Percival's conclusion of her angry remonstrance: "Your father and I must adopt some other plan, if this is to be the mode of instruction."

Margaret could have replied with equal irritation; but, though her temper was not good, she was never wanting in filial respect, —at least in words.

She said something in a low tone about sorrow and tiresome children, and then recalling Harriet, who had succeeded in making the room look neat, told her to go on reading. But her troubles were not ended. Mrs. Percival wished to make some inquiries about Harriet's studies: she thought the book too old for her; Harriet was not clever, and it was not well to force her mind. The observation was made, and supposed to be forgotten; but it was carefully treasured up by the little girl about whom it

was spoken; and many times afterwards, in seasons of despondency or indolence, it recurred to crush her energy, or foster her natural defect. Margaret, in theory, understood her sister's character tolerably well, and felt directly that her mother gave an opinion without knowledge or consideration: but remonstrance would have been useless. The history was put aside, and another substituted; though Harriet, in an entreating voice, stated that she had only just finished it, and had been allowed to begin the new one two days before as a reward.

"It does not signify, my love; I don't choose to be argued against: she will read this, Margaret, over again. A year hence will be quite soon enough for Rollin. If it were Grace, it would be different."

Grace heard as quickly as Harriet; and bridled her neck, and smiled; her memory, too, was good for all observations made about herself.

"And now, my dear," said Mrs. Percival, soothingly, "I have only one more thing to say. I do hope you won't keep the carriage waiting this evening: it worries your father excessively."

"The carriage, mamma!" repeated Margaret.

"Yes, my dear, the carriage. How sadly forgetful you are! We dine at the parsonage this evening."

"Oh! I remember now—but must I really go?"

"You are provoking, Margaret; of course you must. The invitation has been accepted."

"But I said at the time I did not wish it," replied Margaret.

"Nonsense, my love; I won't hear of these fancies; why should your father and I give ourselves the trouble of going out, and asking people here in return, if it were not for you and Agatha? At our age it would be much more comfortable to be quiet."

"Agatha likes it," said Margaret.

"And so must you, my dear. I will never believe, in fact, but that you do; it is not natural."

"The parsonage is so very dull," sighed Margaret.

"Well, so it is; there is no doubt of that: but we must take invitations as they come. The Stanleys are excellent people; and you know it is quite right to pay respect to one's clergyman."

"The dinners are so long," sighed Margaret again.

"Very long, and badly sent up; which I wonder at, for I know they always have a cook when they give a dinner party; but Mrs. Stanley, as a girl, never did know anything of management."

"And they have such a tiresome set of people always," continued Margaret.

"That is the same fault; bad management and short invitations, so that they have no time to choose. But it will be better to-day: we shall have Mrs. St. Aubyn and Colonel Clive."

Margaret's smile was very satirical.

"You may look, my dear; I know what you mean, but you are mistaken indeed. Mrs. St. Aubyn has a great deal of sense when you come to talk to her; and the Colonel must know a good deal, he has been abroad so much."

"Possibly," said Margaret, while the same smile played on her lips; "but they are Agatha's friends, not mine."

"Your own fault, Margaret; Mrs. St. Aubyn admires you extremely. She said to me, only the other day, that, if it were not for your sister, you would be the belle of the neighbourhood."

"But as I have a sister, I am nobody," replied Margaret; whilst the expression of her countenance changed from sarcasm to amusement. "Dear mamma, I have not the slightest wish for Mrs. St. Aubyn's praise."

"You need not despise it," said Mrs. Percival; "if Mrs. St. Aubyn does not talk Latin and Greek, she belongs to a very good family, and she dresses beautifully, and has a handsome establishment; and these are points, Margaret, not to be thought lightly of: they go a great way in the opinion of the world."

"A great way, indeed," said Margaret, thoughtfully; and, turning to Harriet, she put a stop to the conversation, by appearing to give her whole attention to the history.

Mrs. Percival went away, after delivering one more injunction, that Margaret should, on no account, keep the carriage waiting. There is good arising out of every evil,—even out of a dull dinner party. Margaret's chief satisfaction from an invitation was found in the knowledge that it would ensure her a quiet afternoon; for a part, and a most irksome part of her daily duties was to take the children for a walk; but when there was any engagement for the evening, Mrs. Percival preferred having the charge of them herself, or even sending them out with a servant, or allowing them to play in the garden. She did not like Margaret to be fatigued, lest it might destroy her vivacity; and besides, if the walk were a long one, the toilette would certainly be hurried over, and Margaret would be dressed without those marks of elegance and finish which were absolutely essential, if she wished to appear to any advantage in Agatha's company.

The bell rang as usual for the early dinner: Mrs. Percival proceeded to superintend it, for she would allow no one to interfere with an affair which she believed to be important to her children's

health ; and Margaret's luncheon being soon finished, she retired, and, shutting herself up in her room, occupied herself with a book until the pattering of feet on the stairs, the inquiries for gloves and bonnets, and, finally, the loud closing of the house door, proved that the way of escape was open. If she had met her mother she might probably have been told not to go beyond the garden ; and that which Margaret above all things required was change of scene—something which should be free from the associations of books and slates. Mrs. Percival did not forbid a solitary walk, but she would not do anything to further it ; and Margaret's afternoons had often been spoilt by having a companion forced upon her against her will. Either an acquaintance, or her sister, or perhaps even one of the children,—an order being given at the same time that she was on no account to go farther than a mile from home. Happily for Margaret, her wishes seldom went beyond. There was only one direction which she ever felt much inclination to take, and this was towards the park and grounds of the family residence of the Viscount de Lisle. Henningsley was a square baronial-looking mansion, with curious castellated walls, and corner turrets, standing on a projecting elevation in the centre of a large and undulating park. On one side the immense mound bore every appearance of being artificial, from its remarkable precipitousness ; but the road which led to the front of the house, winding upward by degrees, reached at length a broad space, overlooked by still higher ground, and forming the lower part of a range of hills which extended about a mile beyond the outskirts of the domain. There was beauty in the park, and its noble trees, and quiet glades and copses ; and there was antiquity and something of deserted grandeur in the massive irregular style of the edifice, forming a whole which few persons would have undertaken to alter with any view to improvement. But in detail, the building was devoid of all architectural merit. Sash windows and a Grecian portico exhibited themselves as if in disdain of a Gothic archway and an ornamental niche : windows in the drawing-room opened nearly to the ground, and windows in the dining-room were deeply set and mullioned. There was a handsome modern conservatory falling to decay, and before it a strip of garden bordered by a low yew edge, and trees cut into uncouth figures of lions and peacocks. There was a pleasure ground also, the turf of which had once been daily trimmed, and the shrubs carefully nurtured. Now, weeds grew around the sturdy roots of the old laurels ; and arbutus and ilex, holly and acacia, mingled their thin spreading branches, shadowing the dank grass, and threaten-

ing in time to overrun and destroy the few remaining patches of the open lawn. The place was desolate and wretched: many said so at least. Margaret owned that it was the former, but she would never allow it to be the latter. To her it was full of romance. She could walk without weariness hour after hour upon the broad stone pavement which ran along the length of the building, and was bordered by a heavy balustrade built upon the edge of the steep hill; sometimes allowing her eye to wander vaguely over the cheerful wooded landscape which for many miles lay before her; and sometimes turning her thoughts to the dim ghost-like rooms, as they were seen through the dusky windows, and pondering upon the lives and the fortunes of those who, not many years before, had spent within those walls an existence active and hopeful, it might be far happier than her own. The house was kept by a sour-visaged woman, who was its sole occupant; but the general answer to any request for admittance was a sullen shake of the head, and an admonition, that "young folks shouldn't want old folks to do what they was ordered not." Margaret, however, knew that she had nothing to regret. The interior was rambling, dark, and inconvenient; suites of rooms opening one into the other, and piled with unwieldy, tapestried chairs, and cumbrous cabinets, and pictures turned to the walls, and empty frames from which some costly works of art had been from time to time removed. The furniture of the house was an heir-loom, and could not be sold; but it was disposed in as unsightly a manner as could well have been devised, and Margaret had found but little satisfaction in groping about amongst the masses of lumber which prevented her from entertaining any idea except that of the danger of falling.

One thing, however, the house contained, which was a constant source of interest. It was a picture that could be seen, as she looked through the dining-room window, hanging over the carved stone mantel-piece, in a richly wrought antique frame: the whole-length figure of a young girl apparently not more than fourteen years of age. The hair turned over the forehead, and the dress of white satin with the stiff bodies, short sleeves, and deep ruffles of some centuries back, might have naturally given an air of formality even to so early a period of life; but the skill of the painter had succeeded, not only in sketching each fold of the rich dress, each line of the transparent lace, but likewise in retaining the clear dazzling complexion and elastic elegance of figure with which the idea of youth and enjoyment are so intimately connected. She was represented standing in a garden with a basket upon her

arm, over the edge of which a few of the flowers with which it was filled were carelessly drooping. Lightheartedness and hope, and the fulness of delight of a spirit untaught by care, were delineated even in the graceful ease of the figure, which seemed as if about to spring forward in ecstasy; but the expressive features of the face portrayed all that words could have described. The stamp of nobility was traced upon the fair young brow; and intellect, and purity, and refinement were written in the large full hazel eyes and the delicate outline of the nose and mouth. It was a countenance which at one glance must have inspired emotions of affection and admiration; but there was something deeper within. Was it scorn which caused the slight, almost imperceptible, curl of the lip? and the lofty upraising of the head, and the turn of the long neck, could they be indications of pride? Probably few but Margaret would have suggested it, for few besides herself had gazed and dwelt upon the features till they had become engraven upon her heart, even as the features of a living being with whom she had lived, and walked, and held daily converse. The picture was without a name, without a history, at least to her knowledge; but she had formed her own story of early happiness, and a luxurious home, and difficulty and sorrow, and the struggles of a noble but a haughty mind in after years; and now it stood before her, as truly the prophecy of events which had occurred within her own knowledge, as if she had been assured that the facts she imagined were realities. But there was no need to turn to the distant past for associations which should render Henningsley a place of interest. It had been left by its owner, not indeed from any circumstance of crime, or of sudden misfortune, nor from any secret cause which might give rise to curious speculation; but those who remembered the days when the Viscount de Lisle, (the representative of one of those ancient aristocratic families which in England have always adhered to the faith of the Romish church,) had, with his beautiful and gentle wife, kept up a splendid establishment, and offered their hospitality and their benevolence to all, of every degree, within the range of their acquaintance or their knowledge, could not but breathe a sigh of regret, as they thought of the change which lingering disease had made in that once happy household; of the years of exile in a foreign land, visited at first in search of health, and then adopted as a home because the climate of England was ill-suited to the Viscountess's delicacy of constitution; and of the death-bed of both, unsoothed by the sympathies of their friends, though hallowed by the tenderness and devotedness of their child. Both

the Viscountess de Lisle and her husband had died in Italy within a few months of each other; but for many years before Henningsley had been untenanted. The Viscount had always entertained the idea of returning to his native country, and would never consent that the family place should be occupied by strangers, and his last words to his daughter had been an injunction that she should on no account forget the claims of her English property, and the ties which bound her to the land of her fathers. But the words fell upon an unheeding ear. The young Countess Novera, the wife of an Italian nobleman, educated in the communion of the Roman Catholic church, and nurtured in the sunny regions of the south, felt little inclination to view, what she was accustomed to call, the bleak, dark country of heretics, from which her rank and wealth had been derived. Once, indeed, upon the call of positive legal necessity, she was induced, with her husband, to visit England for a few weeks; but neither the attractions of society, nor the kindness of her English relations, could prevail on her to extend her stay beyond the time which was absolutely required. Before her return to Italy, an order was given that Henningsley should, if possible, be let, but there was no one willing to inhabit it. In its desolate, and partly decayed state, it required a larger outlay of money to fit it for a residence than the Countess's agents thought it advisable to expend; and year after year it remained in the same, or rather in a worse condition than before, waiting for some fortunate chance, which might bring forward a tenant willing to make a present sacrifice for the sake of enjoying the place on very moderate terms when it should be restored and repaired.

Margaret had heard, as had every one else in the neighbourhood, of the first visit of the Countess to England; but she was then a mere child, and the circumstance excited no particular attention. The lovely portrait in the dining-room had for her even then a much more real existence than the wife of a foreign nobleman, of whose character she knew nothing, and whom she could never expect to meet: and when, as she grew older, tidings reached England that the Countess Novera was a widow at six-and-twenty, and speculations were afloat as to whether this event would be the means of bringing her to her native country, Margaret was no further affected by the observation than as it involved the probability of Henningsley being shut out from her solitary rambles. Two years had now elapsed since the death of the Count, and the existence of his young widow was almost forgotten, except by those whom business brought in contact with her name. Margaret roamed

through the woods, and paced the terrace at Henningsley with a feeling of proprietorship. She never retained the idea that anything could occur to disturb her enjoyment of the place, and even the cross housekeeper owned at last that Miss Margaret Percival seemed quite to belong to it. It was not without surprise, therefore, and something like indignation, that on the day when she was left, for the first time during a whole week, to follow her own pleasure, and directed her steps as usual to her favourite terrace, she perceived that two strangers had taken possession before her, and were walking up and down with a steady, business-like air, pointing to the windows, measuring lines, tapping the walls with their sticks, and then noting down observations in their memorandum books, with all the freedom of well-established right. Margaret's lady-like feelings instantly suggested the fear of intrusion, and, hastening away, she proceeded to the kitchen to make some inquiries of the housekeeper. The woman, however, was either ignorant or sulky: she would give no information.

"Miss Margaret knew," she said, "that people were down every week to look at the house; and how should she tell anything about them? They must be sent by the agent, Mr. Prior, and if Miss Margaret wanted to know about them, she had better call and ask."

Margaret professed herself not at all curious; she only desired to learn whether there was any reason why she should not walk on the terrace as usual.

"None at all," that Mrs. Collins knew; "but she wouldn't take upon herself to say. Miss Margaret might go and try."

Margaret, however, was not inclined to "go and try;" above all things, she disliked placing herself in a situation where her right might be called in question, and considerably disappointed, she walked away. Mrs. Collins's observation was tolerably true. Persons were at Henningsley, not exactly every week, yet certainly very frequently; but they were generally visitors for amusement, and she had not been incommoded by them. The two strangers were clearly men of business, and Margaret was afraid lest an old threat should at length be about to be carried into execution, and Henningsley be doomed to be pulled down. The thought made her very melancholy, for she began to be aware how great a portion of her daily pleasure had been derived from it. But so it was in every case; hope as she might, it was useless to shut her eyes to the conviction that change was written upon all things here below Even at eighteen, the world was not bright as it had been in childhood; and what would it be at eighty?

ing neither the pleasures nor the pains of the beings amongst whom it dwelt. Margaret felt that her life was not innocent, and she sighed; and the sigh was echoed as if in amusement by some one near her. She turned quickly. A very gentlemanly person, seemingly about eight-and-thirty, stood at a few paces distant, leaning against the wall, and watching her with interest. He was of the middle height; but a slight figure gave him the appearance of being much taller. His countenance, though not unmarked by care, was peculiarly attractive; less, however, from the regularity of the features than from the sweetness of expression which pervaded them, and which softened the effect of the indications of a powerful intellectual mind, given by a high projecting forehead, and a searching deep blue eye. Margaret's face brightened with no ordinary pleasure as she perceived him.

"My dear uncle! how very delightful! When did you come?"

"My dear Margaret! how very delightful, too! I arrived about a quarter of a hour ago:" and then, looking laughingly around to see that no one was near, Mr. Sutherland said, as he kissed her affectionately, "I found the Grove deserted, but I shall not quarrel with a cold reception if I have a walk with you to make up for it."

"We did not mean it," said Margaret, eagerly; "we did not hear anything of your coming."

"No, because I had no time to give you notice; I am here on speculation. A friend in the neighbourhood offered to take my Sunday's duty, and I resolved to give myself a holiday: but you must tell me, are you engaged? is the house empty?"

"Yes, quite; and we have no engagements whatever, except—that is, I forgot—a dull dinner party at the parsonage this evening."

"Which will not be in my way, more than by taking you from me, if I may have a mutton chop, and some tea with the children, instead of a state dinner by myself."

"So like you," exclaimed Margaret, "always thinking how you can avoid giving trouble; but mamma won't hear of that."

"Yes, she will, when I have talked to her a little. Besides, it will give me an opportunity of noting progress. We will have an examination of the young ideas. What do you say, Margaret? are they advancing?"

Margaret shook her head, and could not smile. Mr. Sutherland noticed the expression.

"It is a troublesome task," he said; "but you will manage it by and by. And Agatha — how is she? as gay as ever?"

"Gayer," replied Margaret; "she is become an intimate friend of Mrs. St. Aubyn."

"What! Mrs. St. Aubyn, the widow of Lord Delamere's nephew? How long has that been?"

"About six weeks, or so; but I thought I told you of it when I wrote."

"You mentioned something; but I fancied it was only one of Agatha's numerous conquests. I did not know it had reached to a friendship."

"A friendship, according to Agatha's notions, not mine," said Margaret.

"Well! but at any rate, name it friendship, or what you will, I suppose it is an intimacy."

"Yes, indeed it is. Mrs. St. Aubyn calls every other day; and Agatha is driving about with her and Colonel Clive constantly."

"And who is Colonel Clive?"

"An old, tiresome bachelor-brother, just come into possession of the Ashington property. You need not smile, uncle Henry; he is really an old bachelor — horridly ugly, and very ill-tempered: so Agatha is quite safe."

"We will hope so; and Mrs. St. Aubyn, is she very charming?"

"Very elegant, and fashionable, and good natured. She really does like Agatha, I believe, for it can be no object to her to take her about as she does."

"Elegant, and fashionable, and good natured —" began Mr. Sutherland.

"And brainless," added Margaret; "she has not an idea in her head."

"And so you are all very fond of her," continued Mr. Sutherland.

"Oh, no! not I, nor mamma, nor any one but Agatha: and you know what her fondness means."

Mr. Sutherland walked on a few paces in silence.

"And Grace is still very troublesome?" he said, at length.

"Worse every day," replied Margaret. "I wish, yes, I wish from the bottom of my heart, that I could give up the whole thing."

"You would not be happier," said Mr. Sutherland, mildly.

"But you cannot judge. Each person must know best what is likely to conduce to his own individual happiness."

"Nay, Margaret; look around, and see if each person does know best. The whole world is rushing after happiness, and yet, what mistakes are every day made in endeavouring to find it!"

"Happiness is intended to be the object of our lives, though," said Margaret.

"No; there I must differ from you. It is an old argument of ours: happiness is not to be our object; and if we make it such, we shall never obtain it. And when I said just now that you would not be happier in giving up teaching the children, I was merely putting forward a motive for contentment which might suit you, not one which I should consider satisfactory myself."

"You would require duty, I know," said Margaret; "but we are so different. You are a clergyman, and a good deal older; and you don't care for things in the same way that I do. You don't mind plodding on from day to day at Alton by yourself; but really, I don't think you can understand anything about me."

"Let me try," said Mr. Sutherland, as he turned into a shady lane, which led away from the high road; "or are you tired? Perhaps, as you are to dine out this evening, we had better walk back."

"No, no," exclaimed Margaret; "you don't know half the pleasure it is to have you all to myself: and if I am tired, I shall only be like every one else."

"Well, then, we will go on; and now, tell me, what would you do if the children were taken away from you to-morrow?"

"Sit by myself in my own room all day to indulge in the luxury of quietness."

Mr. Sutherland smiled. "I grant you that would be perfect enjoyment for the time being; but the next day, what would you do?"

"I don't know exactly: you take me by surprise; but I should have more than enough to occupy me!"

"An *embarras de richesses*, in fact," continued her uncle. "German, I suppose, as a study in the morning."

"Yes, certainly; and I should have time for reading then, I should begin with a regular course of it: and I want to understand something of natural history; I rather think I should take up botany, because it would give me an interest in my walks; and besides, I should be able to go on with my drawing; I should sketch a good deal, and practice. Agatha is always complaining

that I never play or sing with her. Now, is there any harm in all this?" And Margaret looked up in her uncle's face with a sweet earnest smile of inquiry, which even to an indifferent person must have been very winning.

"My dear child," he said, as he placed his hand fondly upon hers, "I cannot bear to damp all this longing for improvement. These things are very good, very pure; no one can find fault with them."

"And they would make me happy," said Margaret.

"No, Margaret, there is the mistake; they would not make you happy. Taken up as you would take them up, constituted from inclination only the business and object of life, they would but render you miserable."

"But why?"

"For the very reason that they are so pure and good in themselves. When you once grew weary of them you would have nothing to fall back upon."

"But that is assuming a case," said Margaret.

"It is only assuming what must happen, sooner or later, with every object in life, except one."

"I need not trouble myself till the time arrives, though," said Margaret. A sigh from her uncle, as she spoke the words, recalled her to other thoughts. "I am vexing you," she said; "I always do when I talk to you."

"No; I was wrong to sigh. I feel, I know, that you will think differently by and by."

Mr. Sutherland stopped, and walking aside to a gate which opened into some meadows, stood apparently intent upon the view which was to be seen from it. Margaret followed him, and resting her hand upon his shoulder, said, in a low voice:

"I do think differently, sometimes."

Mr. Sutherland turned towards her and smiled. But she could not know the thoughts which were passing in his mind. She could not then have understood them; for the hope which is felt by those who have given up their hearts unreservedly to their Maker, when the first awakening of a holier spirit is perceived in the friends whom they have loved and sorrowed over, can only be comprehended by minds which have learnt to read truly the lesson of this mortal life, and can realise, though but in a faint degree, the immeasurable destinies that are dependent on it. Mr. Sutherland loved his niece more dearly than any other earthly being. He was a man whom the world envied; unmarried, popular in society, respected, and even admired. His income

indeed was very small, but his parish was not large, and he had no claims upon him beyond; and for all these reasons he was frequently instanced as an example of comparatively perfect human prosperity. That he had no wife was, of course, his own choice; and people had really learned to believe at length, that he never intended to have one, and was quite contented without. And Mr. Sutherland was contented. He was thankful that he had been strengthened to submit without repining to the decree which had consigned to an early grave one whom he had hoped might have been the solace of his life; and now, after the lapse of twelve years, when he could trace the current of events, and see how they had all contributed to good, he could acknowledge that such a dispensation was best for his own character; that it had enabled him to devote himself more fully to his duties, and to live without that absorbing interest in things belonging to this world, which from his natural disposition might otherwise have proved a snare to him. But the world could not know the struggle which preceded the peace that Mr. Sutherland now enjoyed; and Margaret, who was just beginning to prize his affection, and to consider it as something peculiarly her own, from hearing it constantly asserted that she was his favourite, little imagined that it had grown up by slight degrees; because, in the depth of his affliction, when he shrank from exposing his feelings to common observation, her quickness, and simplicity, and childish love, had served to divert his thoughts, or to cover the agony of a secret grief. Mr. Sutherland cherished Margaret as a child, more perhaps for the sake of another than for her own; but even an absence of several years did not diminish his affectionate recollection of her; and when, a short time previous to their present meeting, he returned to the neighbourhood to take possession of a living, and renewed his intercourse with his sister's family, his early predilection strengthened into a fondness, which had in it something of a father's proud delight, and of a brother's warm unreserved intimacy. Margaret was now almost a woman, and her uncle was still in feeling a young man. They were more on a par, more like a sister and an elder brother, at every meeting; and the charm of Margaret's character was daily increasing. Mr. Sutherland saw her faults; he knew her to be irritable, self-willed, and visionary; and he heard his sister's complaints of her neglect, and love of seclusion, and want of interest in common affairs; but he saw that these defects belonged to a noble mind. Margaret was not only winning in manner, and more than pleasing from the varying expression and striking

intelligence of her countenance, but she was also generous and candid, and humble in her opinion of herself; pure and simple in her tastes, and possessing a delicacy of feeling which he had never seen equalled. She could appreciate goodness, though she did not follow it; and her enthusiasm in favour of all that was noble and beautiful in history or fiction required but one principle to elevate it into a devotion to true greatness.

That principle Mr. Sutherland gently but unceasingly strove to infuse; yet less by talking of religion directly than indirectly. His wish was rather to convince Margaret of the unsatisfactory nature of her present life than to bring before her, when her mind was not prepared for it, the prospect of a better; and often, when his own heart was filled with thoughts of piety and gratitude, he would listen to and sympathise with her complaints of the insipidity of life, and scarcely do more than insinuate that the defect lay in herself, and not in the arrangements of Providence. Margaret's taste, though fastidious to a fault, was never offended by anything her uncle said. At times, when the conversation had given a higher tone to her mind, she would bear from him remarks, and even reproofs, which would have chilled and repelled her, if they had been spoken without caution by any other person. Her reserve was never intruded upon, and she was not distressed by descriptions of personal feelings which she could not comprehend. Mr. Sutherland's voice was the more calm, his words were the more guarded, as his interest became excited; and it was only by a deepening tone, or a reverent earnestness of manner, that Margaret could see how fervent was the zeal, how unwearied and devoted the affection, which had been awakened in her behalf. So it was in the present case. Mr. Sutherland's reply to his niece's confession was simple, almost unconcerned. "You will soon think differently always," he said, as he turned homewards. "I have prophesied it, have I not, often? and I think the time is coming."

"Do you?" said Margaret, gravely. "I believe I should be happier if it were."

"I do not only believe it, but I know it. The human mind, Margaret, was not formed for earth, and earth cannot satisfy it."

"But," replied Margaret, "that is my difficulty. There are some persons whom I can see to have important duties; I can imagine their having exalted ideas, and living, as I sometimes hear you say, above the world. It is a pleasure to fancy myself like them; but daily life, eating and drinking, and teaching the children — what greatness is there in such things?"

"And what greatness is there in studying Schiller and Dante, and practising music and drawing?" inquired Mr. Sutherland.

"No greatness," said Margaret, sighing, "only amusement, and that they lead to great thoughts, that they give one a feeling of inspiration."

"And when the feeling is passed, what then?"

"Yes, I know; I allow that it is all momentary; but at the time it is superior."

"No, Margaret, not so — at least according to my ideas. All things are, in themselves, petty alike."

Margaret looked up in surprise. "But that is very unlike your usual way of talking. What do you mean?"

"Let us carry on our thoughts a few years," replied Mr. Sutherland. "You will not be angry, Margaret, I know, to be told that you cannot be young for ever. Suppose yourself grown old,—a wrinkled woman of eighty,—with white hair, hobbling about on crutches."

"Or leaning on a gold-headed cane," said Margaret: crutches are so plebeian."

"Well, a gold-headed cane if you will. Now you are to look back upon the eighty years; and you shall have been, if you like, a very wise woman, or say, perhaps, more truly, a learned one: a linguist, and a metaphysician, and a beautiful artist, and a splendid musician,—anything and everything, in fact a female admirable Crichton. Now, at eighty years old, what will remain of all this knowledge?"

"Good to others, perhaps," said Margaret.

"But good of what nature? When these others have reached the same age, what will they themselves be the better? or—for it is the question which we must come to at last—what portion of it will they carry with them into another state of existence?"

Margaret was silent.

"We were reading together a most striking part of the book of Ecclesiasticus when I was here last," said Mr. Sutherland; "do you remember it? There was one verse which spoke of a hope or an object in life, which is 'like dust that is blown away with the wind; like a thin froth that is driven away with the storm; like as the smoke which is dispersed here and there with a tempest, and passeth away as the remembrance of a guest that tarrieth but a day.'"

"The hope of the ungodly," said Margaret, thoughtfully: "yes, I remember the passage very well."

"Ungodly means not grossly wicked, but simply not godly," said Mr. Sutherland.

And there was a long pause.

"I cannot feel it," exclaimed Margaret, at length. "I know all you would say; but it does not come home to me; and there seems a fallacy at the bottom of it. The very instincts of our nature teach us to find pleasure in knowledge and art, and cultivation of the mind."

"There is pleasure, pure and lasting pleasure, to be found in all; but not in the way in which you would seek it."

"I know no way of finding it but one," said Margaret,—"*studying*, because I like it."

"Then you delight in inanimate beauty, a body without a soul. All that is admirable in reality or imagination can be but like the statue of Prometheus, until we have caught the fire from heaven which is to gift it with life."

"If studying satisfies me," said Margaret, "what can I want more?"

"But, Margaret, you mistake your own feelings. The insipidity you complain of, the weariness at your daily occupations, prove that you are not satisfied."

"Not with my daily occupations, certainly, but I have a world of my own which no one can enter."

"A world of phantoms,—and your spirit is immortal, and the craving for truth is rooted in the very depths of your being."

Margaret quickened her steps. It was the sign of the disturbance of her mind. Mr. Sutherland feared he had pressed the subject too far.

"Perhaps, I teaze you," he said: "our conversation always seems to turn upon this one subject."

"It is impossible to be otherwise," replied Margaret, "for I believe it is uppermost in both our thoughts."

"In mine, I own; but I can scarcely think that it is in yours."

"Yes, when I am with you; when you are absent I can forget, and go on in my own way; but the very sight of you brings a sense of doubt. My life is a dream then, because I know that you think it so."

"How can I help it? I see you resting upon shadows. You are imagining happiness, when you might be enjoying it."

"Are you happy?" said Margaret, turning quickly round.

Mr. Sutherland waited before replying, and a slight flush passed over his face. "Yes, Margaret," he said, at length, in a deep, subdued tone, "I am happy. So far as I have learnt to dwell in

the world which is invisible, I am quite happy; but the lesson is yet miserably imperfect, and while it is, there must still be trial."

Margaret's heart smote her. She had forcibly intruded herself into the sanctuary of those feelings which were reserved only for the eye of God; and the lowliness of her uncle's words was painful to her. She could not yet appreciate humility.

"I know I do not understand you," she said, as they came in view of the Grove, and she saw that the conversation must soon be terminated. "Your notions are as unreal to me as my world of fancy appears to you."

"My meaning will soon be told," he said, "if you will bear to hear it. I would say that the higher qualities of our being, the admiration of the beautiful and noble, the craving for affection, the desire of immortal fame, and all that raises our thoughts above the needs of our animal life, are so many remnants of that perfect nature which was given to us at our creation, and degraded, not utterly lost, at the fall. That these instincts must be either satisfied or crushed; and that God, when he deigned to work out the restoration of mankind, provided for their full gratification."

Margaret's attention was excited, and as her uncle stopped before the entrance gate, she gently drew him on.

"There is no hurry," she observed; "we will turn again."

Mr. Sutherland readily assented to the proposal.

"I need not say to you, Margaret," he continued, "how strong these principles are, nor how great is the pleasure of indulging them: upon that point, at least, we are agreed."

"And upon many others, I trust," said Margaret, affectionately.

"Yes, upon many; but there is one on which we are essentially at variance. You say that you find your happiness in the imaginative exercise of these feelings, that you form your own world, and people it with your own characters, and that you enact in it scenes which interest you. I say, that where the foundation is unreal, the pleasure must be unenduring."

"I will grant that," said Margaret, in a thoughtful tone.

"But there is a world," pursued her uncle, "it is in part invisible like yours, and it is peopled with beings, some perfected by trial, others struggling to become so; and in this world scenes are enacted upon which depend the destinies, not of years, but of eternity. If we would seek for persons to admire, Margaret, where shall we find them but amongst those who have lived on earth the lives of saints? And if we wish for an object to set before us, where can we find a greater than that of training ourselves and others for heaven? And for love—it is the strongest

instinct of our nature—there is One now looking upon us, who gave up heaven for our sake."

Mr. Sutherland spoke rapidly, and then stopped himself, as if fearful of being carried away by his own earnestness.

"That world is for the good," said Margaret; "it is beyond me."

"Yet you have been admitted into it: its claims are upon you, and you cannot escape from them."

"Yes, of course, I know," and Margaret blushed slightly; "but this is so vague. We are all Christians certainly, and I am sure we ought to be a great deal better than we are; I mean to try some day. But the ideas which you put forward are, as I said before, beyond me: still I can entirely agree with you, that it is necessary to do one's duty and go to church, and I really believe, though perhaps you will scarcely give me credit for such a principle, that nothing but a wish to do what is right would induce me to go on teaching the children."

"I do give you credit for it, sincerely: my only wish is to make it a pleasure as well as a duty; to save you from the perpetual struggle between imagination and reality."

"Ah! if you could—but two things so opposed!"

"We argue in a circle," said Mr. Sutherland; "but you shall do me one favour, Margaret. You shall take St. Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians, and exercise your imagination by fancying that you are reading it for the first time. You have an Italian Bible, I know; read it in Italian, or German, or anything which will give the words the force of novelty. Do not stop at the chapters, but go on to the end; and then ask yourself, honestly, what its purport is. And I would say," he added gently, but very impressively, "that if you will, before you begin, pray for the guidance of the Holy Spirit, there will be no further need of my words to convince you, that truth contains more to satisfy us than fiction. You will pray, dear Margaret, won't you?" he repeated again, as they once more stood at the Grove gate: "it would make me so happy to be certain that you would."

Margaret's eyes glistened, "You need not fear," she said: and, withdrawing her arm quickly, she entered the house.

CHAPTER IV.

THE dinner parties at Deering parsonage were, as they have been described, most commonly dull in mental, and inferior in physical qualifications. Mr. Stanley was a good-natured, liberal man, having a great dread of innovation, and no very elevated idea of the duties of his profession. He distributed blankets and coals at Christmas, and gave the school children a feast on the lawn at Midsummer. When he was sent for he attended to his poor parishioners, and when he was invited he never failed to visit his rich ones. Some persons criticised, and observed that the latter was a more favourite duty than the former; but, be this as it may, Mr. Stanley was properly alive to the reciprocal duties of hospitality. Regularly as the year passed, the circle of his acquaintance were in turn invited to dinner, and having provided plentifully for their bodily needs, Mr. Stanley felt himself under no other obligation for their amusement. His wife occupied herself with the business of arrangements, the smallness of her rooms, and the awkwardness of her servants; and had but a divided attention to bestow upon her guests. There was an effort about her, an air of indifference about him; and the homeliness which would have been unregarded when accompanied by a sincere welcome, was in consequence exaggerated and ridiculed.

Margaret endured, but impatiently, the weariness of the long dinner, and the lingering trial of the talking evening, looking over prints which she had seen twenty times before. She had no interest in anything, and was only once aroused to attention by hearing a few words of conversation between Agatha and Mrs. St. Aubyn. Agatha's countenance was lighted up with pleasure, whilst Mrs. St. Aubyn said something about a flying visit, and an absence of merely a week:—*à propos* to what Margaret could not find out; but Colonel Clive was required to add his entreaties; and Agatha was looking at her mother, as if desirous even then of making a request, when the carriage was announced. Mrs. St. Aubyn's manner was very kind, and Margaret could not help acknowledging that, notwithstanding her insipidity, she was really pleasing from her good nature. The short drive home was a silent one. Margaret received no explanation to satisfy her curiosity, for Agatha was not in a communicative mood, and the conversation was left to Dr. and Mrs. Percival, Margaret being afraid of making remarks before her mother, lest it should bring

upon her a lecture on the duties owing to society. Mr. Sutherland was waiting for them in the library. He would not allow that he had been lonely, for the children had stayed with him till nearly nine o'clock; and since then he had been reading: but he was pleased to see them return so soon, and expected a full description of their gaiety. Agatha gave it in rather exaggerated terms; even the mistakes of the new man-servant, and the blunders of the cook, were not forgotten; and Margaret grew uncomfortable. It did not suit Mr. Sutherland's look of thoughtful attention. His smile was sweet, it was never otherwise, but he was soon satisfied; and Margaret felt, as she had often done before, that the affairs of common life, even the routine of a dinner party, assumed a different aspect when he was present.

"I have a secret for you, Margaret," said Agatha, as they stood together, lighting their candles, before separating for the night.

"For me? why? what?"

"Yes, for you; but you are not to hear now."

Margaret would not appear to care, though her sister evidently meant that she should. "If I am not to hear, there is no use in inquiring," she said; "so, good night."

"But you will like it, though I am not sure it will come to pass. You have talked of it very often; so we have both. If it does happen, you won't find fault with Mrs. St. Aubyn again."

"Agatha, how extremely childish! If Grace were to behave so, I should punish her."

Agatha looked pleased. She had a weak love of tormenting in trifles, particularly when Margaret was concerned; for it was the only way in which she could prove that she had any power over her. "Good night," she said, taking up her candle; "I must go and talk to mamma. You need not trouble yourself to think, —you will never guess."

Margaret might have made a hasty reply; but Mr. Sutherland appeared from the drawing-room, and the impulse was checked. She did not know why. It was not shame merely, for that might have kept her silent, but it could not have made her amiable; yet she did really feel forgiving towards Agatha, and their sisterly embrace was cordial. Agatha ran up stairs, and Margaret lingered by the hall table. "Are you tired, my dear child?" said her uncle, as he marked the change of her countenance from its usual bright expression.

"Dinner parties make one tired,—and thoughtful too," said Margaret.

"I think they often do; but I am not sure that that is an objection against them."

"Not only tired, but disgusted, discontented."

"The dinner parties! are you certain of that?"

"What am I now?" said Margaret, half smiling; "and what has made me so?"

"Ah! that is the question: what has made you so?"

"Dull realities," replied Margaret, archly; "soup and mutton, tea, coffee, wine, and whist."

"Nay: they are satisfying realities; you can have no fault to find with them."

"Well, if you will, Mr. and Mrs. Stanley, Colonel Clive, Sir James Dermot, &c. &c.; but I was afraid you would scold me for saying it."

"No, I never scold: it seldom does any good."

"Specially to me," observed Margaret: "the proud Percival spirit rebels against it."

"And you would not wish it to do otherwise. You are a little proud of your pride, Margaret."

Mr. Sutherland spoke lightly, but Margaret saw that there was a deeper meaning underneath. "I am never proud of it with you," she said.

"And some day you will not be with any one: you will have a new code of morals."

"But till that day comes,"—began Margaret.

"It must come soon, or it may come never. Margaret, love, this world was not meant for delay."

Margaret lighted her uncle's candle, and bent forward for his kiss. "Thank you, God bless you, my child," he said, and they separated.

"This world was not meant for delay." The words rang in Margaret's ear; they pained and oppressed her, and she turned from them; but they haunted her,—spoken in the serious tone, and accompanied by the look of affection, deeper than could be told, which so frequently impressed Mr. Sutherland's casual remarks upon her mind. Margaret was in truth, as she had said, disgusted and discontented; but her thoughts were directed into a new channel. The dinner party was, in a manner, forgotten. She was not inclined to criticise it; for it was only when incited by the wish to produce a laugh that she was ever really satirical. Her mind was too candid to be severe, and when aware, as in solitude she constantly was, of at least some of her own imperfections, she had no will to dwell upon the frailties of others. With

a sensation of greater mental than physical fatigue she seated herself at her dressing-table, and gave way to a train of wandering reflections which gradually settled into deep self-reproach. Could Mr. Sutherland be right? was it true that her code of morals, her principle of action, was a false one? It was an hour when, if ever, conscience must assert its supremacy. Silence and repose were around her, there was no distraction, either from business or pleasure,—no glitter of vanity, no beauty, even of the external world, to call her attention aside. The question would be answered. And for the moment it was answered, by the memory of childish offences, and the sins of advancing years; passion and pride, irreverence and undutifulness, selfishness and frivolity, and the long list of ignorances and errors, which make the days of our youth a burden even to the most innocent; whilst still, amidst them all, came the same warning voice, but sterner and more urgent,—"This world was not meant for delay." An Italian Bible lay beside her. It was occasionally read, and Margaret could feel intense pleasure in some parts from their awful beauty and simplicity. Now it was taken up with a different view. She turned to the epistle of which her uncle had spoken: the study of that, at least, she would not delay; and the resolution afforded her a transient satisfaction. But Mr. Sutherland had given her another injunction; he had spoken of prayer, and this also must be obeyed.

Margaret was in no presumptuous mood: how can we ever be when the phantoms of our buried faults are crowding around us? It was not the wilfulness of pride which made her shrink from the idea of prayer; but "God was in heaven, and she was upon earth;" and the duty which had so often before been performed without preparation seemed suddenly to require an earnestness of devotion which she felt herself wholly unable to give. The Bible was resumed, in the hope that after reading it her mind might be in a better tone; but she was not at ease, and it was closed again, and as she knelt to ask what she still hesitated to express in her own words, the prayer, which from childhood she had heard as duly as the Advent season returns to bid the Christian world prepare for the coming of its Lord, recurred to her recollection. Margaret had said it often before; it had been learnt as a lesson for the Sunday, and written in the blank page of her first Bible; but at that moment it seemed fraught with a deeper meaning. Humbly and sincerely, and with no hope of acceptance for her own sake, it was uttered as the language of the heart; and then

Margaret rose, and once more opening the volume of inspiration commenced her appointed task.

The hour of midnight had gone by, and Margaret was not at rest: her weariness had passed away, and the whole energies of her mind were awakened. They were indeed wonderful words which lay before her, telling of that eternal counsel of the Most High, by which the children of His adoption, the redeemed and forgiven, are gathered together in one body under Christ their Head, and made to be "the fulness of Him that filleth all in all." They spoke of the "riches of a glorious inheritance," of "access by one Spirit unto the Father," and of the mighty change whereby they who had once been "strangers and foreigners" were made "fellow citizens with the saints" and parts "of the household of God." Margaret read, as she had been advised, without pausing at separate chapters, without even endeavouring to master the difficulties which they contained. Much was incomprehensible to her, as it had always been; but the purport of the whole could not be doubted.

It was addressed to persons whose position was totally different from that which it could have been by nature. It gave them a motive for action, not from what they were expecting to obtain, but from what they had already received. It reminded them of the privileges and responsibilities of a high vocation, and after detailing, even to minuteness, the course of daily life which they were to pursue, it warned them that in that life, in the struggle against "bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking," and the temptations of a corrupt nature, they were contending not merely against the weaknesses and impulses of their own hearts, but "against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places." There was something strange to Margaret's own mind, in the new form which the well-known words had assumed; and as she pondered upon them, a glow of elevation and hope passed over her. There was then, something to make life important; a rank to maintain, even that of the child of an Almighty Father; an object, even the defeating the temptations of that spirit of darkness, who till then had been to her more a chimera of the imagination than a living being. The love which, through shame and agony, had removed the curse from a sinful world, and made her, at her baptism, a member of the Christian church, was to be the spring of her gratitude and her exertions; and the crown which awaited her in heaven, the hope that was to animate her ambition.

Were they new tidings? Was Margaret Percival, with her talents, and enthusiasm, and energy, uninstructed in the fundamental principles of religion? In a Christian country, admitted into the Catholic church, and taught to conform to its outward rules, this could not be. Margaret knew all that was required to be known and believed "for her soul's health;" and yet on that night, as she tasked all the powers of her intellect to realise the truths of which she had read, they came to her with the stunning overwhelming force of a fact, awful yet not to be doubted, which is heard for the first time.

Many must have felt the same. Many must have known the vivid clearness with which words, learnt from childhood, will sometimes flash upon the mind; bringing with them, in their hidden meaning, a light to shine upon the darkness of our ignorance. "The heaven which lies about us in our infancy" does indeed "fade into the light of common day" as we advance farther into life; but it exists, though unknown, save in a nominal belief, and when our eyes have been re-opened to behold it, there is nothing but our own wilful sin which can again hide it from our sight: — Margaret's feelings could not, however, be lasting. We may rejoice in newly acquired honours and privileges; but when they have long been ours, yet neglected, they can be viewed only with shame. The same apostle who spoke of the mystery of God's will, and the "exceeding riches of His grace," spoke also of holiness, meekness, long-suffering, forbearance, — the signs of that new nature which, "after God, is created in righteousness and true holiness." — Where were they? — Once more, Margaret's conscience answered sincerely, and tears of real repentance rose to her eyes. They were not the first which she had shed, for she had often thought of goodness, and longed to practise it; but they flowed from a deeper source — for it was the sense of her own ingratitude which touched her.

There was little, however, that was overpowering in this self-reproach. Margaret accused herself, and justly, of coldness; for it is not until we have been taught fully to appreciate our blessings, that we can really understand the extent of devotion which is due from us; and Margaret had no glaring sins to humble her, at first sight, to the very dust. She was young, and simple-minded; and ignorant of much of the world's evil. Yet when, at length, exhausted by mental and bodily fatigue, she prepared for her short night's rest, and confessed, in the accustomed words, that she had "erred and strayed from God's ways like a lost sheep;" the acknowledgment was made as it had never been

before, and her hope of forgiveness rested not upon the trust which had so often deceived her, the resolution of future amendment, but upon the merits and intercession of the Saviour, in whose name her petitions were offered.

CHAPTER V.

MARGARET had advanced a step, a great step, in her knowledge of the truth. So she was conscious of having done, when she awoke the following morning, and faintly and gradually the recollections of the preceding night came to her mind. But if there had been only a passing excitement then, there was still less remaining now. The words which had so forcibly struck her, when read in the silence of midnight, lost much of their impressiveness when remembered in the light of day. Yet their meaning was the same—the fault lay in herself, and she felt it painfully.

Mr. Sutherland's mind had so far formed his niece's, as to teach her that feeling is to be stimulated by action; and when Margaret found herself cold and insensible, scarcely able to comprehend the force of expressions which, but a few hours before, had seemed to give a new impulse to her existence, there was no endeavour to arouse herself by any unnatural effort. Her prayers seemed miserably imperfect, but she tried to fix her attention, and her wandering thoughts were recalled as often as perceived. She opened her Bible, and whilst hurried from being late, read over a few verses, and forced herself to bring the import before her understanding, though they made but little impression upon her heart; and before descending to the breakfast table, she considered the circumstances which would, most probably, arise to try her temper, and asked that she might be able to subdue herself. It was a beginning, and made in sincerity; and upon all such beginnings the blessing of God will assuredly rest.

Margaret was not the last of the party who appeared. Agatha's place was still vacant, and Margaret was glad, for it saved her from a possible reprimand. Mr. Sutherland had kept a vacant seat for her, and offered her the little attentions which bespeak affection much more than words. Perhaps he scarcely knew himself how clearly his partiality was shown, but it caused neither envy nor remark. Margaret received so little notice in general, in comparison with her sister, that no one thought of grudging her the

love of an uncle. His kindness was felt now more than usual, for Margaret's heart was burdened. All things were in appearance the same; the room, the furniture, the party, the signs of opulence and comfort; and to the outward eye she was the same also, but there were thoughts within her mind upon which the whole current of her future life might depend.

It is strange, yes, almost surpassing belief, were it not for our daily experience, the contrast between the movements of the world within our own breasts, and that which lies open to our senses. We eat and drink, we meet and converse, we mingle in the pursuits and interchange the courtesies of life, and call ourselves friends and brothers; and on the neutral ground of earth's interests and of our common hopes of heaven, we may and ought to be such. But how few, how very few, are ever permitted to pass the barrier which separates the inward and the outward man, — to gaze upon that region where dwell side by side the secret motives of vanity, selfishness, and ambition, and the silent but unutterable yearnings of affection; the fervent aspirations of devotion, and the aching pangs of conscience; that region where the true business of existence, the existence that shall never end, is transacted unceasingly, though perhaps unconsciously, by each for himself alone. There are moments, and they can never be forgotten, when, under the pressure of some overwhelming grief, or the influence of external circumstances, we are tempted to unbar the portals of our hearts, and betray the secrets of our "prison house." We speak of hopes that have long been dead, and joys passed away for ever; we mourn over the sins of our youth, and the oft-repeated offences of the present day? and strengthen ourselves against future temptations by resolutions to which another's heart is witness. And at times we even dare to open the sanctuary of our renewed nature, and breathe into a human ear the faint sighings of that heavenly love which is the foretaste, as it will be the fulfilment and perfection, of our eternal happiness. They who have communed in such hours are friends indeed,—in the sight of God, as well as in the eye of man. But even with them, beyond the sympathy and the fulness of the love which Heaven has blessed, there are sadder secrets — many and untold; thoughts which the ear of affection would shrink from hearing, feelings which even in the anguish of repentance could scarcely be acknowledged, depths of the mystery of sin, unperceived even by ourselves, and fathomed only by that Almighty Being, who has pronounced that "the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?"

The world which we bear about with us must differ widely from the world in which we appear to dwell. It is in this contrast, this want of harmony between the visible and invisible, the seen and the felt, that lies the trial of our daily life; and often as we are tempted to judge hastily and unkindly, to murmur at the moody look, or to reprove the sigh of discontent, it may perhaps check us to remember that when earth is bright to us, it may be dark within the hearts of those we love; and that the slight symptoms of annoyance which jar upon our sensibility, or ruffle our temper, may be but the signs of some inward struggle, with which, if we could behold it, we should but too painfully sympathise.

Margaret was grave when all around her were gay. She made some efforts to be otherwise, but they were awkward and unsuccessful; and her manner was noticed and commented on both by her father and mother. Mr. Sutherland remarked it also, but he said nothing. He did not even offer a glance of compassion; but he endeavoured to change the conversation; and, after a few hints from Mrs. Percival upon the disagreeableness of silence, the general attention was directed to Margaret.

"She is tired, poor child! I suppose," said Mrs. Percival; "she exerts herself so much when she is out; not that there is much occasion for exertion at the Rectory, every one is given up to dulness."

"There is no engagement for to-night, is there?" asked Mr. Sutherland.

"No, happily," exclaimed Dr. Percival, throwing himself back on his chair, and taking up a newspaper. "Half a cup more tea, if you please, Julia; and a little stronger."

"I don't see why any one should say happily," observed Mrs. Percival, who was always alive to the probability of Margaret's love of seclusion being strengthened. "If persons did not meet now and then, and try to make themselves agreeable, what would become of them? what would there be worth living for?"

"A very good thing society is," began Mr. Sutherland; but, as his eye caught Margaret's, he smiled, and allowed the rest of his sentence to remain unfinished. He had no wish to bring forward the often disputed argument between her and her mother. Margaret ate her breakfast, and did not look up, but she tried to think of something to say.

"I don't trust you, Henry," remarked Mrs. Percival: "I believe, in your heart, you are quite as bad as Margaret. You bury

love of an uncle. His kindness was felt now more than usual, for Margaret's heart was burdened. All things were in appearance the same; the room, the furniture, the party, the signs of opulence and comfort; and to the outward eye she was the same also, but there were thoughts within her mind upon which the whole current of her future life might depend.

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"The postman ought to be here by this time; I can't wait any longer. We really must make some new arrangement."

"I have spoken about it, my dear," replied Mrs. Percival. "Margaret, I told you to call at Salter's yesterday, and say that he must be more punctual." Margaret's blush showed that she had forgotten. "So like you, Margaret; there is no dependence upon you. I do wish, Henry, you would talk to her a little about attention. No one has any influence over her besides."

Margaret had a peculiar sensation of shame when reproved before her uncle, and her colour deepened. It was humiliating to be spoken to as a child in the presence of the only person who appreciated her justly.

"We will go to school together, Margaret," said Mr. Sutherland, laughingly: "I don't know which wants it most."

"Margaret is really trying," said Mrs. Percival. "Harriet's copy-book was not sent for yesterday; and Philip came to me before dinner to tell me there had been a whip forgotten which was to have been bought for him. It is such a bad example to the children."

Grace and Harriet were sitting in a distant corner of the room, learning, or pretending to learn, some lessons. Their breakfast had been over an hour before; but it was their privilege to come in and out of the room as they pleased, at this particular time.

"And Margaret did not find my scissors, mamma," said Grace, looking up: "I lent them to her the day before yesterday."

"Dreadfully careless!" muttered Mrs. Percival. "Never mind, my dear; go on with your lesson, she will find them by and by."

The trial of temper was such as Margaret had anticipated. It was not the actual complaint which she disliked, for she knew that it was deserved; but the manner in which it was made; and especially, the allowing a child like Grace to join in the reproach.

"Your scissors are in my basket, Grace," she said, in a tone which only Mr. Sutherland understood; "you had better go upstairs and fetch them."

Grace went, and Mrs. Percival again commenced her lectures upon neatness, to which Harriet was an attentive listener. Margaret sat humble and silent; and every one felt awkward, except Mrs. Percival. Even Dr. Percival at last thought that the subject had been sufficiently discussed; and, seeing no signs of the postman, was going to leave the room, when the letters were brought in.

"Four for me, two for you, Julia, and one for Margaret; from Craven, I think."

The letters were distributed; and Margaret, taking hers, was about to retire that she might read it alone, when Mrs. Percival, looking up, exclaimed, "Don't go, my love. We all want to know what Craven says. Read it out." Margaret sat down again, but she did not begin to read. The first few lines of her brother's letter showed her that it was not intended for the public eye.

"My dear Margaret,—We are off for Ireland, instanter. I thought it would be so, but it has come at an awkward moment. My father really treats me very shabbily: do tell him so. A hundred pounds at this moment would not settle all my affairs comfortably; yet I am not a whit more extravagant than others — less so indeed. Many men call me shamefully economical—keep this to yourself. I must manage as I can now, but I can't go on in this way. Do stir my father up—you and Agatha can do anything with him. Ireland will be fun, and nothing more; so don't let my mother be frightened. If it were not for this perpetual torment about money matters, I should like the change well enough. I shall write to my father when we get there. I can do it better when the sea is between us. Love to all. I heard a flaming account of George the other day from an Eton man. I suspect he is destined to support the family honour, after all; at least, I am sure I shan't.

"Yours affectionately,
"CRAVEN PERCIVAL."

"Well! Margaret; we are waiting," said Mrs. Percival, deliberately folding her own notes.

Margaret's eyes were fixed upon the unfortunate letter. She did not dare say that it was private. "Craven writes very hurriedly," she replied; "but he is going to Ireland."

"Is he indeed? when does he sail? Dr. Percival, do you hear? Craven is going."

"Very probably, my dear: it will do him no harm. What does he say about it, Margaret?"

"Only that he is going, and that he likes it. He does not mention the day. He sends his love, and tells me he will write to you, papa, when he gets there. Oh! and besides, he mentions that he heard what he calls a flaming account of George the other day, from some one who had been at Eton."

Mrs. Percival was growing impatient. "But what does he say? Read it, my dear; read it: you can have no secrets."

Margaret turned from one page to another, and was still silent.

"Very strange!" observed Mrs. Percival; "is anything the matter?"

"No; he is quite well, I believe, and he is pleased at the change; but ——"

"A little private matter, I suppose," said Mr. Sutherland, lightly. "Brothers and sisters will have such sometimes: witness our memories, Julia."

"Indeed! my memory witnesses to nothing of the kind," remarked Mrs. Percival, coldly. "I can't understand it. I have no notion of children's having any secrets from their parents; you may tell Craven so, Margaret. I suppose you intend writing to him upon this important business by to-day's post."

Margaret made a reply which no one heard; and, hiding the obnoxious epistle in her hand, hastened away. Agatha followed, and of course increased Mrs. Percival's displeasure; and it required all Mr. Sutherland's soothing gentleness, and Dr. Percival's indifference, to convince her that, when arrived at an age to judge and act for themselves, brothers and sisters may sometimes be allowed to interchange letters without the inspection of their parents. Agatha's curiosity was as little satisfied as her mother's. Margaret declined saying anything more than she had already done; and, locking the letter in her desk, answered it by entreating her brother to be careful in his expenditure, as she was certain her father would not increase his allowance, and begging him on no account to write to her again upon any subject which could not be mentioned to every one. And so the first germs of a confidence, which might have been turned to much good, were destroyed. Margaret, though inexperienced in the ways of the world, saw clearly that Craven's reckless good nature was leading him into mischief; and she thought that her influence, however slight, might possibly be of some avail in checking his career of folly: but her mind revolted from deception, and without it there could be no hope, under her mother's system of supervision, of keeping up anything like an unreserved intercourse.

The contents of the letter did not then particularly weigh upon her spirits. Her brother had often before complained openly of being distressed for money, and Dr. Percival had written angry letters, and afterwards paid his bills. So she supposed it would be now. That there should be any difficulty in the matter, was an idea which never suggested itself, for her father's profession appeared an inexhaustible mine of wealth; and, turning from the

consideration of an affair in which she felt herself helpless, Margaret proceeded to her usual duties.

CHAPTER VI.

THE schoolroom on this day assumed a new aspect under the influence of a trifling change of management. Margaret put aside her novel, though she had reached the most interesting part of the third volume. She had only read it at intervals before, but it distracted her attention, and the children took advantage of her absence of mind to be negligent. Her temper was not so much tried when she gave herself up fully to the task before her; and even Grace, after venting some petulant feelings, by reminding Margaret that "she ought not to find fault, because Mamma declared she was extremely careless herself," became sobered by finding that a watchful eye was over her.

Mr. Sutherland looked into the schoolroom as the luncheon hour approached; and there was a simultaneous rush towards him from the three children. Grace tried to jump up to his neck; Philip begged to be taken for a ride on his back; whilst Harriet stood at a little distance, holding in her hand a drawing, which Margaret had just told her was particularly well done. Mr. Sutherland playfully shook the little ones off; promised them a game of romps in the garden; paused to examine Harriet's drawing, and assure her that she was making progress; and then went up to Margaret. She was busy in marking the conduct books, and did not look up till she had finished. Mr. Sutherland examined the grammars and dictionaries; and, when the registers were put aside, he said, "I shall be afraid to intrude again if you are so very orderly. I thought you did not care for interruptions."

"I don't sometimes," said Margaret; "but you know"—and she smiled gaily, yet with an expression of serious thought,—"there are such things as reformations."

"Yes; very necessary they are in some cases:—don't quarrel with me: I mean nothing personal, except to myself. But the reformation is not to last all day, I suppose; you will go for a walk with me this afternoon."

"If I can, of course. I never refuse that; yet what shall we do with the children?"

Mr. Sutherland gave a merry glance at Philip, and threatened

to lock him up; and immediately there followed a torrent of entreaties that they might all go together "to the river, for Philip to sail his boat."

"And you and I to discuss metaphysics!" said Mr. Sutherland, drawing Margaret aside: "no, that will never do; we must make some better arrangement." Margaret looked blank.

"The children must be attended to," she said; "and there is no one to take them out but me. Mamma will not often trust them with the servants."

"I suppose she is right; but if we have them with us, can you keep them in order?"

"Impossible, quite,—you have no idea of the labour. As to authority I have none."

"Influence then?"

"Still less," said Margaret. "What can influence do with children? They have no mind to understand it."

"Oh! Margaret, what an assertion! I must make you retract."

"Well," acknowledged Margaret, laughing, "I suppose they have, like the rest of the world, only I never found it out."

"Harriet, Grace, Philip," cried Mr. Sutherland; they gathered round him instantly:—"You all want to go for a walk with me this afternoon, don't you?" There was an eager exclamation,—"Yes, yes, delightful!" but Mr. Sutherland held up his finger for silence. "The misfortune is, that our wishes don't entirely agree; that is, I should like a walk with you very much, if I did not want to talk to Margaret; but when you make a noise and jump about, talking is out of the question."

"We won't interrupt, we will be very quiet, uncle Henry," said Harriet, drawing nearer to him.

"How can I be sure?"

"Promise, promise, we'll all promise," said Grace.

"No, not promise, because promises are serious things; but sometimes I try to please you, don't I?"

"Yes, very often indeed!" Philip's voice was the loudest, and his little round face was put up for a kiss.

"Always," said Harriet.

"Well, now, I am sure you will like to please me in return: so to-day, if you choose, we will go out together; but Margaret and I must walk alone; and we will not go to the river, because we should be thinking all the time that you would tumble in and be drowned; which would be unpleasant to you, and give us the trouble of picking you up again: are you very disappointed, Philip?"

"Not very;" but there was a flush on Philip's cheek, which contradicted his words.

"We will go, I think, to the Ashington meadows, continued Mr. Sutherland, "where Margaret and I can walk round and round, and you can play in the middle. But then, remember, you are not to run up to us every minute, but to let us be quite to ourselves. Now, who will do this?"

"I, I, I," was repeated hastily.

"Try to do it, I mean," said Mr. Sutherland: "do it to please me?" He paused, and looked round.

"I won't come up once, uncle," said Harriet.

Mr. Sutherland patted her head: "and Grace will not, I am sure; and Philip, I know, likes to be good-natured; and perhaps to-morrow we may manage to go down to the river."

"Philip's eyes sparkled; and Grace whispered, "I like to be good-natured too, to uncle Henry."

"Every one likes it," said Margaret.

The compact was sealed by a kiss, and the children began to put the room in order with a proud feeling of satisfaction at having it in their power to confer a favour.

Margaret sighed as she went upstairs. Why could not she govern in the same way? There might be something in the rareness of Mr. Sutherland's visits; and that he was never called on to punish them; but she was certain this was not all: and something in the tone of Harriet's voice, when she agreed that her uncle always tried to please them, had struck her as a reproach. Margaret was not unkind to them, but she could not say that she had often put herself out of the way for their gratification.

She was dressed for her walk, and just going to join her uncle in the garden till the children were ready, when a knock and ring at the door announced a visitor. Agatha was at home, so she was not afraid of being detained, though she stayed in her room that there might be no meeting on the stairs. The measure was an imprudent one. Agatha had no objection to some visitors, but she was not fond of making her society too common; and having observed from the window the entrance of Miss Debrett at the gate, immediately vacated the drawing-room. Miss Percival was nowhere to be found when her mother sent for her, and Miss Margaret received a summons instead.

"So excessively tiresome!" she exclaimed, as she passed her uncle on the stairs; "I shall be kept waiting half an hour at least."

"Never mind, we will wait."

"But the beauty of the afternoon will be gone; and really Agatha ought to have a little consideration: she makes me see every one."

Mr. Sutherland did not suggest either patience or charity: he hoped that Margaret would soon learn to do this for herself. "I don't dislike Miss Debrett," he said, "though I know it is the fashion to do so."

"You never dislike any one; but she is intensely wearisome."

"Yes, possibly; yet I am not sure but it depends upon the view you take of her—whether your mental telescope is adjusted to the right focus for seeing her excellencies."

"And if there are none to see."

Mr. Sutherland turned away with a smile.

"We always differ upon the premises," he said, and he then ran down stairs. Margaret waited for an instant to consider what he meant, and then entered the drawing-room. Miss Debrett came forward to meet her, both hands extended. She was a middle-aged, sickly-looking, lady-like person; with light, almost flaxen hair, tolerably good features, and a rather pensive expression of countenance: whether caused by mental or bodily suffering could not be exactly determined. Both might have had their share, for Miss Debrett's life had been one of great trial, from the loss of friends, and was now embittered by loneliness and general ill health. She was one of the stray atoms of society, and had attached herself to Dr. Percival's family because she was unable to depend upon herself either for diversion or occupation. To lean upon something was one of the great needs of her nature; and whether it were a mother, a brother, a sister, a favourite servant, or, as it chanced to be, an old acquaintance, signified little, so long as her anxious, doubtful mind could be at rest. Mrs. Percival had just that sort of regard for her which she would have had for anything that she could govern at will. She pitied her whilst finding amusement in her weaknesses; and Miss Debrett, in simple unconsciousness that anything was passing in the world beyond what actually came before her senses, called Mrs. Percival her dearest friend, and confided to her all her petty worries, in the fond belief that they were listened to by a willing sympathising ear.

"Ah! my dear," she said, as, to Margaret's annoyance, she kissed her cheek, and carefully scrutinised her countenance; "what an age it seems since I have seen you!—you are looking delightfully well."

"I met you in Staunton the day before yesterday, I think," said Margaret.

"Did you, my love?—oh, now I remember! I was passing Drayton, the haberdasher's, looking at his new ribbons; but I was very ill,—very ill, indeed, that day. You won't think it unkind that I forgot, will you?—you are quite certain, now?"

Margaret assured her it was perfectly natural: she often did the same; but the tone was not sufficiently energetic to be satisfying.

"Yes, it must seem unkind; but you don't know me. Such dear old friends!—the best I have; how could I ever be ungrateful to them!"

"The last thing any one would accuse you of," said Margaret. "But I hope you are better to-day."

"A little, thank you. I was not out yesterday. I was worried about Jenkins. She had a friend to see her, and went out for a walk."

"There can be no harm in that," said Mrs. Percival.

"No harm, exactly, but they say she is going to be married; and then what shall I do?"

"Not worry yourself before the time," observed Mrs. Percival.

"No, to be sure, you are right there. Still it comes across me sometimes; however, I won't think about it, if I can help it. Margaret, my dear, you have not told me about all your gaiety. You dined at the rectory yesterday."

"Yes," replied Margaret, "papa and mamma, Agatha and myself."

"Very pleasant it was, I dare say. Mr. Stanley is such a good-hearted man; and Mrs. Stanley is so very attentive."

"They are extremely good-natured people," said Margaret.

"And I hear they give such handsome dinners. Mrs. Stanley asked me once; but, you know, it would not suit me. My poor shattered frame was not made for dinner parties; so I told her, and she was kind enough to excuse it quite readily. And whom had you there, my dear?"

Margaret enumerated the guests.

"Mrs. St. Aubyn!—well, that was grand. I did not know they visited. And Colonel Clive too! How did Agatha look?"

Miss Debrett's face was lighted up by a meaning expression, and she looked steadily at Mrs. Percival, contrary to her usual habit of casting wandering, nervous glances about her.

"Agatha looked very well," said Mrs. Percival; "but why do you ask?"

"Oh! nothing, nothing; though we are such old friends, I don't mean to be angry because you won't let me into every secret."

Margaret laughed; "You mean that Colonel Clive admires Agatha, I suppose? I should think it a very safe admiration on both sides: a man of fifty and a girl of nineteen."

"Colonel Clive is eight-and-forty, Margaret," said Mrs. Percival.

"The two years cannot make much difference," continued Margaret, "and such a man, too,—a furious temper!"

"Ah! but love, my dear, love does wonders," said Miss Debrett. "I never despair of any temper when a man is in love."

"No, not when he is in love; but what is to be done afterwards, when the love has sobered down?"

"I have not heard any one else say that Colonel Clive has a furious temper, Margaret," said Mrs. Percival: "it must be one of your exaggerations."

Margaret was a little conscience-stricken, and acknowledged that "furious" was rather a strong term, but it was not a good temper, that was certain.

"Ah! well, we can't have everything in this world," philosophised Miss Debrett. "Ashington is a beautiful place. I shall like to see my dear Agatha mistress of it."

"Nay," said Mrs. Percival, whose good taste made her object to open inferences on such a subject, however she might cherish the idea in secret; "I must beg you to be careful; it is really a mere fancy of yours, without foundation. Considerable mischief is done by coupling young"——Margaret's smile was expressive, and she checked herself,—"any persons' names together."

"Well, I won't say anything, if you dislike it; but I may think —you won't mind that?"

The question was put with the serious intention of giving up the thought likewise, if necessary; but Mrs. Percival's veto did not extend beyond the lips, and Miss Debrett continued,—

"Great changes there will be all around the neighbourhood soon, I suspect: not that they will signify to me, a poor weak invalid. But I shall like to know that Henningsley is inhabited."

"Henningsley!" repeated Mrs. Percival, in surprise; "I suppose it is only one of the old reports."

"Much more than that; surveyors or architects, or something, have been down, looking at it; so Jenkins tells me. She met one of them yesterday in Staunton; he was purchasing drawing-paper at Locke's, the stationer. Jenkins went there to buy me some envelopes; some of those, you know, which you have at sixpence a hundred."

"But about the architect?" said Margaret, who for once was interested in Miss Debrett's communications.

"Oh, nothing about him, except that when he went out Jenkins asked one of the shop-boys, a cousin of hers, who he was, and said it was a strange face; and then she heard all about it."

"About Henningsley, you mean, I suppose?" said Margaret, "what is to be done with it?"

"Why, that is the secret, my dear; nobody knows. If I had been pretty well, I intended to have gone into Staunton this afternoon, to call on the Priors; he being the agent, I suppose is likely to have heard."

"The wisest thing would be to pull it down," said Mrs. Percival.

"Oh! mamma," began Margaret, but Miss Debrett interrupted—

"It won't be pulled down, that I am nearly certain of. Jenkins's cousin said that there was some notion of the Italian Countess,—I don't know her name,—coming to live there."

"Very unlikely, indeed," said Mrs. Percival, decidedly.

"You think so, do you? Well, perhaps it is not probable; but I won't mention it, if you consider it better not. If she were to come I suppose she would not visit much, being a foreigner."

"Scarcely that," said Margaret, "considering her English parentage."

"And her birth-place, too," added Miss Debrett, "I remember quite well when she was born. You don't, my dear Mrs. Percival, I suppose; you must have been in Dorsetshire at the time. And you don't either, Margaret: you were not born yourself."

"I remember hearing of it," said Mrs. Percival; "I was in the neighbourhood."

"Were you? How very strange! so was I. I was quite young then, Margaret; though perhaps you would hardly believe it: such a wreck as I am."

"It must be eight-and-twenty years ago," said Mrs. Percival.

"Yes, just that; eight-and-twenty years this April. Ah! many things have happened since then."

Miss Debrett sighed, and it was a sigh with which Margaret could always sympathise. There was a tale of a deserted home —sickness, and sorrow, and loneliness, which, though often repeated, never failed to awaken kindly feelings whenever it was alluded to; and she might have learned much from the tone in which one whom she looked upon as in every way her inferior, added: "But we must not complain—I am sure I ought not—so many comforts as I have, and such dear friends."

There was a silence; and Margaret, notwithstanding her compassion, hoped that Miss Debrett would take leave; but the duties of friendship had not yet been fulfilled. Inquiries were to be made for every individual member of the family, Craven amongst the number, and Margaret watched the expression of her mother's face, as she replied, in answer to the question where he was: —

"Oh! in Ireland, I believe; but he is not communicative — Margaret can tell you most."

Miss Debrett applied to her as a matter of course; but she had less interest in Craven than in any other of her dear friends. She was afraid of him. He did not scruple openly to turn her into ridicule.

Margaret related, in a few words, all that was necessary, and heard in return that some one had seen him in town, and said he was a very fine young man, and that some one else had protested he was a generous, noble-hearted fellow, and gave capital dinners to his brother officers.

The words made very different impressions upon the listeners. Mrs. Percival drank them in with all a mother's pride; but Margaret, after the first glow of sisterly feeling, found that they rested painfully on her mind, and aroused a misgiving as to whether a handsome person might not be an incentive to selfish vanity, and whether the generosity and the capital dinners might not be in some way connected with extravagance. Still Craven was her brother, and till lately she had been accustomed to look up to him. It was not easy to descend at one step from admiration to censure.

Miss Debrett's interest in the Percival family was at length satisfied. She had heard a good report of all, even of little Juliet's bruised elbow, — occasioned by falling down stairs; and after another hearty shake of the hand, and, to Margaret's annoyance, another kiss, she departed, and Margaret hastened to join her uncle. Agatha met her in the garden, and begged for a quarter of an hour's conversation; but Margaret excused herself, unless the business was very pressing. Agatha could not say that it was; but she hinted that her sister would lose a good deal by not remaining to hear. Margaret, however, considered a walk with her uncle a greater loss than any of Agatha's mysteries were likely to be; and finding that the same endeavours to rouse her curiosity were to be used which she had resisted on the preceding evening, assured Agatha that she would listen patiently to all she had to say on her return, and then hurried her uncle away to escape any further delay.

CHAPTER VII.

THE children's promise was resolutely maintained. Philip looked back rather longingly every now and then; but he was kept in order by Harriet; and when the Ashington meadows were reached, and they were allowed to run about at will, there was not the same temptation to appeal continually to "Uncle Henry." Margaret was not much inclined for conversation at first — she enjoyed her uncle's presence, and was quite contented to be leaning on his arm, certain that he was sharing her pleasure. Silence is a great advance in intimacy and unreserve, especially in a pretty country on a beautiful day in Spring, and few observations, except a short account of Miss Debrett's visit, were made by either, till they seated themselves on a bank at the upper end of a steep field, commanding a view of the church and village of Deering in the foreground; and behind, the castellated walls, and grotesque turrets of Henningsley, standing out boldly beneath a wooded ridge of hills. Mr. Sutherland was the first to speak, and he said, what every Englishman would have said on a similar occasion, "A most delicious day certainly."

"Most delicious," replied Margaret; and there was silence again.

Mr. Sutherland took off his hat, and indulged in a pleasant reverie, and Margaret watched the shadows upon the distant hills, and wondered whether it would ever be possible to paint them.

"The children are good children, really," said Mr. Sutherland, as he noticed them playing together. "I did not think they would have been so careful."

"You don't know your own power: they would do anything for you."

"I scarcely know why that should be — they see little enough of me. It seems more probable that they have nice dispositions."

"Tolerable. — Grace is a sad torment; the others would be very fair if they were well managed."

"If? Are they not well managed?"

"You are laughing at me," said Margaret; "but I don't care. It was absurd to imagine that I was ever equal to such an undertaking: how could I know anything about it?"

"Who does know?" said Mr. Sutherland.

"Yes, who does? I very often wonder; for I never see any practice that I approve of; and books on education are so dull, that they are not readable."

"They are so true, generally," said Mr. Sutherland, smiling.

"And my mind instinctively turns from truth, I am sure," continued Margaret: "you know, as a child, how I would read story books instead of the Roman History."

"I don't think any one likes copy-book truths," observed Mr. Sutherland; "and the reason is, I suspect, that they are not truths; they don't go deep enough."

"Unknown depths there are in children's minds," said Margaret; "I have a clear remembrance of some in my own."

"Then cherish them; they will teach you more than any books. What we want is, the history of a child's mind, not from theories, but facts. We cannot see into the minds of the children about us; and, in general, we never begin to think what our own were till we are so old as to have forgotten. Your age is just the one for making observations on education."

"But I suppose you have a theory like the rest of the world," said Margaret.

"I have to a certain extent; not like the bed of Procrustes, upon which every mind is to be stretched."

"And the fundamental principle is what?"

"That a child must be ruled by sight; which is not a very wise or deep-sounding one — is it?"

"I don't know; but it is not what I should have expected from you."

"There is nothing new in it," said Mr. Sutherland; "it is merely the old maxim of example before precept; perhaps I should carry it out farther than some would. There is nothing to which it may not apply."

"Of course one tries to set a good example," said Margaret.

"That is, you don't get into passions or tell stories; but there must be something beyond that."

"Illustrations, please," said Margaret; "you know of old that I can't endure generalities."

"Well! then what do you say to this? I have seen a party collected round a fire on a cold winter's evening; the governess taking her place in the warm corner, and the children quarreling amongst each other which should stand nearest. There has come a lecture upon selfishness in consequence. Now, suppose the governess had moved, — which would have been the most efficacious, deeds or words?"

"But to give up to children always," exclaimed Margaret; — "to put them first! that can't be right."

"Pardon me, I said nothing about always. Be as exacting as

you choose for other persons, but as self-denying as you can for yourself, remembering always to uphold your own authority at the same time, by insisting upon implicit obedience. Besides, children have a clear perception of the difference between what they may claim as a right, and what is granted as a favour. Make them obey and respect you, and they will always put you first."

"Ah! but how to make them respect you!" said Margaret.

"They will readily, if they see you just and consistent, acting out what you teach. I mean in this way,—you wish a child to be attentive, therefore your whole attention must be wholly given to the lesson before you; there must be no indulging in dreams, no taking up stray books: if you do, your words will be thrown away. Shall I go on?"

"Yes, pray do. I dare say I shall be self-convicted; but never mind."

"Then, again, you require obedience; but you must first practise it. The best example, of course, is that of obedience to the Church and your parents, but even when the laws are of your own creating, they are laws, and that is sufficient. They must be adhered to, unless for some very cogent reason, simply as an example of obedience. If they are altered, others must be substituted. It is the sort of living 'from hand to mouth,' with rules made for every emergency, and none fixed, which ruins a child's idea of government. Punctuality is an admirable thing for this reason; because it is an external command to which they see you give way."

"The copy-books say it is the soul of business," said Margaret.

"Yes, that is a specimen of what I mean by a copy-book truth not going deep enough. Sincerity is another thing insisted on in children; yet I have seen persons shuffle, and delay, and make any excuses, in order to conceal their ignorance. If you don't know a thing, say you don't. A child's natural opinion of your superiority will not be at all shaken by it. And so in confidence; if you wish to receive it, you must show it. Children will have secrets: let them come to you, and tell you that they have them; that they had rather you would not know what they are talking of. Let them receive and write letters as they choose, as long as you know who the correspondents are. There is nothing gained by the opposite course: if the secrets are not allowed openly, they will be had privately."

"Yes," said Margaret, remembering the morning's letter from her brother, "that is quite true."

"But all this is so old," said Mr. Sutherland: "after all, one can but talk truisms."

"They are not truisms to me," said Margaret; "if I knew them I did not think about them."

"Shall I mention politeness then?" continued Mr. Sutherland. —"I was present at an amusing scene the other day at a luncheon table, when the children's dinner was going on at the same time: there was a perpetual 'do this,' and 'do that;' and 'don't eat too fast,' and 'hold your knife and fork straight;' and all the while the lady, I don't know whether she was an aunt or a governess, was reaching across the children, and helping them without the least nicety; making them feel, in fact, that there was a complete difference between the decorum required of them and the grown-up party. What they saw, and what they heard, were entirely at variance."

"I always thought education a very self-denying task," said Margaret.

"If it is not, I am sure it can never succeed," replied Mr. Sutherland.

"But you have been keeping principally to externals," said Margaret; "you would think religion the chief thing; how would you teach that?"

"Precisely in the same way. A child's religion is reverence. Be reverent yourself, and you will do more than a hundred sermons."

"How reverent?" inquired Margaret. "I don't see that it is possible to be otherwise."

"Reverent in forms and outward observances, I mean," said Mr. Sutherland.

The words "How like a Romanist," rose to Margaret's lips; but the allusion was one which her uncle never permitted to be made in jest.

"I am right, I am sure," he continued; "and I will give you an instance, since you must have illustrations. A friend of mine was one day hearing a little girl repeat a hymn or the catechism, I forget which; she was accustomed to put down her work while the child said it; it was simply a feeling of reverence in her own mind, and she had never made a remark upon the subject; but the child observed it, and said, 'I know why you do that, mamma; you don't like us to repeat sacred things when you are working, just as we should any others.'"

Margaret seemed struck by the idea, because, though simple, it was practical.—"You would be more particular than I am," she said.

"Possibly I might be, because I am not alive to the influence of actions. I would never let a child put any thing upon a Bible, or repeat hymns in play, or say grace when people were talking, or lounge at prayers; and I would rather read the Bible to him than allow him to read it for himself: certainly I would never permit it to be made a lesson book. But really, Margaret, these things are so obvious, I am half ashamed to mention them."

"Never mind," replied Margaret; "they are details, and they suit me; that is, they do me good."

"I think by these means you would give a tone to a child's mind," continued Mr. Sutherland; "as for anything beyond,—it is not in our power. Prayer is our only hope there."

"But you would explain the Bible, would you not?" inquired Margaret.

"Yes, at a certain time every day, making it totally distinct from any other lesson, and not allowing any one to join in it whose conduct had been particularly faulty. At those times I would read it aloud myself, and then catechise upon the facts, collecting all I could to make them interesting. I mean illustrations of manners and customs, and coincidences in profane history."

"Yet that sort of information is scarcely the object for which we read," observed Margaret.

"If it were not one object, why should the Bible have been given to us in its present form?—why is it not a code of laws, or a bare statement of facts?—Think besides how much of the Bible is a sealed book to us when we grow up, merely because no light has been thrown upon it when we were young."

"And is that all you would do?" said Margaret, in a tone of disappointment.

"Most assuredly not. I would draw out all the practical lessons I possibly could, and apply them to the little incidents of daily life; but I would avoid warm expressions of my own devotional feelings, and I would be careful how I encouraged children to talk openly of theirs."

"And where would be their confidence in you?" said Margaret.

"Talking is not confidence," replied Mrs. Sutherland; "children deceive themselves just as grown-up people do. There are seasons, certainly, when they are under the influence of fear or sorrow, and occasionally (I have known such myself), when conscience is awakened, at which they will tell their private thoughts, and truly; but the natural atmosphere of a child's mind on religious subjects is reserve; and if you attempt to force it you

may commit the same mistake as in pulling open a rose-bud to make it grow."

"I would not force it on any account," said Margaret.

"You do so unknowingly, if you encourage that pretty-sounding, plausible style of conversation, which some people so delight in. Children are charmed to be taken notice of, and the mere attention with which you listen to them is an incentive to their vanity."

"Then you can know nothing about their minds," said Margaret.

"The question is, whether by such conversation you really do read their minds: whether you do not run the risk of making them unconsciously hypocrites; and whether, in fact, you do not gain a much truer knowledge of them indirectly, than directly."

"How do you mean indirectly?" inquired Margaret.

"By drawing out their opinions; watching them at play; sharing their interests, and so gaining their affections."

"Yes, to gain their affections," said Margaret; "that is the great thing."

"The great thing, undoubtedly: but may I give you one piece of advice, Margaret? do not think too much about it. Follow the analogy of the material world. We walk straight, but not by looking at the road; we play music correctly, by keeping our eyes on the book, not the notes; we conduct ourselves properly in society by thinking of others, not ourselves; and we gain the hearts of children by following out a strict, yet affectionate line of duty, more than by trying to obtain their confidence, or to make them love us."

"Yet it is a great temptation," said Margaret; "one longs so to know what is passing beneath all we see."

"Still rest contented. God is working there; and the fruits will be seen in good time."

"But what is good time."

"Such an age as fourteen, fifteen, and upwards. Then the mind begins to be formed; and then is the season to throw off the strict rules which are imperative in childhood."

"People do not generally think so," said Margaret. Many are more strict then, than when children are quite little."

"I cannot help considering it a great mistake. I should have more hope, even from over-indulgence at that age. Unfortunately, parents spoil their children in infancy by allowing them to be disobedient, and so they are forced to put them in trammels, just when they long to be free."

"And confidence goes irrecoverably," said Margaret, sighing, as she thought of her mother.

"Yes, if people could but imagine the mischief they do, by not insisting early upon implicit, instantaneous obedience! But it seems scarcely fair for those who are not parents to criticise those who are."

Margaret rose to walk home; but there were many other points on which she wanted her uncle's opinion, and his ideas seemed cold.

"Would you never have any devotional reading with children?" she said, stopping as she was about to summon Harriet.

"Yes, as an act of worship; or, which is most to be desired, in the daily services of the Church. At night, too, when a child is old enough, I would accustom it to read a psalm, or something of the same kind; but at those times, external circumstances—the assembling of the whole family, or, the sacredness of the building, or the stillness of night, insensibly prepare and touch the feelings: there is no forcing them."

Margaret could not say that she agreed, and her uncle perceived what was passing in her thoughts.

"My notions seem formal," he said; "but I hope I would not for the world encourage anything of the kind. I only think that religion in a child's mind is a plant nurtured in secret by God. We may dig, and prune, and water it, but we must not hope to discover whether it has taken root except by its fruits. If we take it up and examine, and analyse its fibres, it will die."

Margaret felt that she had much to think of, and scarcely wished to pursue the conversation. Mr. Sutherland called to the children, and as they ran up, proposed to Margaret a practical lesson on good nature; a story to amuse them part of the way home. Margaret could not deny the request, and giving up her place to Harriet, she tried to act upon Mr. Sutherland's hints by holding a parasol over her, and carrying a root of Forget-me-not, which, by the aid of Philip's knife she had dug up to plant in her garden. Mr. Sutherland's story was ended before they reached home, and again he sent the children away. To Margaret's surprise there was not a word of discontent.

"That is from a child's sense of justice," he said, in answer to her look of wonder: "justice and gentleness will rule a man's world in time, much more a child's."

Margaret agreed, but the latter word came home to her more forcibly than the former. She was not aware of being unjust, but she was certain of not being gentle. Her manner was quick,

her expressions were hasty. Without meaning to be angry, she often repelled and frightened the children, and many times, when they would have gone to her with their little griefs and joys, they were deterred by the dread of the sharp tone in which she would tell them that she was busy, and they must run away. Irritability and confidence can never go together.

CHAPTER VIII.

AGATHA'S power of secrecy had been sorely tried since the dinner at Deering Parsonage. She longed to impart her intelligence; but her delight in mystery triumphed, and it was not till the dressing bell warned her she had no time to lose, that she put an end to the ingenious hints and quibbles by which, on Margaret's return from her walk, she had endeavoured to stimulate her curiosity. Margaret was at last really as anxious as her sister desired, and entreated that she might be told before they went down to dinner.

"I think you have tired me quite enough, Agatha; so please be good-natured at last."

"I am not sure but what you are destined to be a heroine," said Agatha. "I suspect you would bear the rack if you were put to the trial."

"No, I am sure I should not. I never set up for being anything of the kind."

"But you looked so grand when you turned away last night, and pretended not to care:—there you are doing just the same now."

Margaret was beginning to arrange her hair, for she had no patience to expend upon any further petitions.

"I am going to ring," she said, holding the bell in her hand.

"A threat! a threat!" exclaimed Agatha, in glee. "I am so rejoiced I have brought you to that. But stop, don't ring just this minute: I will fasten your dress. Now, what do you say?—what should you think of going with Mrs. St. Aubyn for a week's visit to France?"

"You?" said Margaret; "I should think you would enjoy it extremely."

"No, not me only, but you too. Colonel Clive is obliged to go to Rouen about some business of signing papers. He has a friend there, who is ill, and cannot come to England; but he is obliged

to return immediately; and Mrs. St. Aubyn is so excessively good-natured, she has set her heart upon having us both. She said at first that she did not like to ask because of their only being absent a week, and not being able to go further than Rouen, but Colonel Clive urged it."

Margaret's eyes sparkled with pleasure.—"You are not in earnest?" she began.

"Yes, entirely; every word is truth."

"For a week did you say?—to Rouen? How extremely kind! —the place of all others I have longed to see. But, Agatha, what made Mrs. St. Aubyn think of it?"

"I don't know. She wanted a companion, and she is fond of me."

Margaret paused in the middle of her toilette to endeavour to realise the proposed enjoyment. "But papa and mamma," she said,—a slight distrust checking the previous delight,—"what do they think about it?"

"Oh! they are charmed.—To tell you the whole truth, it is to be Colonel Clive's treat to us. He insists upon it, and Mrs. St. Aubyn will not consent to take us on any other conditions."

"The world must belie Colonel Clive after all," said Margaret; "that very cross face of his never would make one give him credit for such kindness."

Agatha only smiled; and having finished dressing her sister, ran off to her own room. There was a bright sunshine over Margaret's world at that moment; brighter than it had been for many months. To escape the children, and their lessons, and all the worries of home, and to see a foreign country for the first time, without a care but that of amusing herself! At eighteen, who would not have been happy at such a prospect, even though the pleasure were only to last for a week, and not to include Paris? Travelling, foreign travelling especially, had been one of her day dreams, as it has been that of most persons at some period of their lives. Any want of sympathy in her companions was overlooked, for Margaret had learned to live without sympathy, except when her uncle was with her, and when abroad she was certain that she should need it less than ever. There would be so much to interest, and Agatha would undertake the task of entertainment; and as Margaret satisfied herself with this conviction, a smile stole over her face at the thought of how much Miss Debrett's suspicions would receive confirmation by the intended journey. The home dinner-party was often a trial to her, from the want of congeniality in taste and opinion between herself and her parents;

but on this evening everything was delightful. Mrs. Percival entered warmly into the new idea, and began to plan for her children's comfort; talked of the necessity of carrying very little luggage; and recommended, to Margaret especially, a case with needles, thread, pins, and tape—just such a one as she had taken herself, when she went abroad for her wedding tour. Dr. Percival prophesied amusing disagreeables, and protested that if either of them returned with a taste for French cookery or French finery, he would never acknowledge them as his daughters; and Mr. Sutherland ransacked his memory for everything worthy of note in the towns and villages which they were to pass; and sincerely desired that Mrs. St. Aubyn had extended her invitation to him. Margaret's glance across the table showed how much she responded to the wish. The hour before tea was equally agreeable. For once Margaret had no inclination to study, but gathering the children round her, made them guess what was going to happen; and amused herself with giving rhodomontade answers to their questions; ending, however, by the real and very satisfactory promise of bringing home, if not a cart-load, as Philip wished, at least a large box full of French bonbons.

"We shall all expect presents, Margaret," said Mr. Sutherland, who just then came into the room. "I have been thinking what I should like, but I can't make up my mind. The Church of St. Ouen is the only thing I covet much."

"Bring him a picture of it," whispered Harriet.

"So I will: but I am afraid, if he is covetous, a picture will not satisfy him."

"Uncle Henry is not like the youngest princess," said Grace, holding up a book of fairy tales, which she had been reading; "she didn't want anything."

"Ah! but then, Grace, that was in fairy times!" exclaimed Mr. Sutherland. "I dare say, now, if the truth were told, that youngest princess was better off than any of her sisters in the end."

"Yes, that she was; she was so rich, and she married such a handsome young prince, and had a palace, Oh! I can't tell how large; a great deal larger than this house."

"Well! that was very pleasant, and all because she was good, and didn't ask. Suppose we don't ask, but say, 'thank you,' for all that Margaret will give us."

"It was not merely because she didn't ask," observed Harriet; "but she was never cross."

"And she loved her papa," continued Grace.

"Extremely good qualities, indeed," said Mr. Sutherland, with

mock gravity. "I'm sure I should have been very fond of that youngest princess. Do you think I can ever be like her?"

"O, Uncle Henry, how funny!" said Philip; "why, you are a man!"

"So I am,—I forgot: but still, I should be glad never to be cross. I think I shall try."

"If you are the youngest princess, Margaret will be the old king," said Grace, laughing with delight at the idea.

"Exactly so. Margaret will be the old king and go to France, and I shall be the youngest princess and stay at home; and you must all be the naughty ones."

"No, no, no!" exclaimed all the children.

"But what is to be done? If I am good, you must be bad."

"No, no; we will all be good," said Harriet.

"All of you?—Grace, and Philip, and you, and I too? That will be making a story of our own."

"So it will!" exclaimed Grace; "we will have a story of our own."

"And all be like the youngest princess, and see how very well we can behave whilst the king is away. Perhaps that will be best. I shall try and learn my lessons perfectly."

"You have not any to learn," said Harriet.

"Yes, I have; a good many that you don't know anything about. But won't you learn yours, too?"

"Yes, all of them," said Harriet.

"And get up early in the morning," continued Mr. Sutherland; "and not be cross all day, and do just as we are told; and write such beautiful copies without any blots, Philip? I don't think the king will know us again when he comes back, if he finds we are so much improved."

"The king will be very pleased," said Margaret, looking amused.

"Shall we really try, Uncle Henry?" inquired Harriet.

"To be sure; I mean to do it now. I have a letter to write; and I know the princess, if she was so good, never could have wasted her time; so I am going to begin it directly." Grace tried to stop him, but he went to the table.

"There is Baker come for one of the princesses," said Margaret.

"Not yet, please let me stay a little longer," exclaimed Philip, fretfully.

"Oh! Philip, Philip, that is not at all like her," said Harriet.

"No," remarked Mr. Sutherland; "there can be no doubt that she went to bed directly her nurse came for her."

"And Uncle Henry did what he had to do at once," said Harriet.

"Yes, of course; because we made the agreement."

"Are you really going to try, Uncle Henry?" said Philip, in a changed tone.

"Yes, really. Will you give me a kiss?" Philip threw his arms round his uncle's neck, and after going the round of the rest of the party, went cheerfully to bed. Mr. Sutherland continued writing, and when Harriet and Grace tried to interrupt him, he persisted in declaring that he could not break his word; he had said he meant to be good, and so he really must be: and the little girls were at length half puzzled by his manner.

"I do think Uncle Henry is trying," said Grace, as Baker appeared again at the door, and without delay she prepared to depart. Mr. Sutherland smiled, and Margaret read the smile, and thought of the conversation of the afternoon. It was a specimen of the government of sight.

The play of the preceding evening was not allowed to be forgotten the next day, nor on any other before Mr. Sutherland returned to Alton; and by that time he had contrived so fully to impress it upon the children's minds, that they had learned to remind each other of it, and to exercise a control amongst themselves. It was now often a matter of ambition — which should give the least trouble; and although the improvement could not be expected to be invariable, or very permanent, yet at that time it was a particular assistance to Margaret. A week's travelling, especially in a foreign country, involves almost as much of preparation as a month's; and independently of this, Margaret's mind was, in spite of herself, unsettled. It was disagreeable to find that she could not fix her attention to study — that her thoughts would never remain bent upon any one subject; but it was painful to discover how much her late impressions of seriousness had vanished. The world was delightful now, and there seemed but little necessity to seek for comfort in anything beyond. Happily, Margaret's sincerity saved her from entire forgetfulness. She had begun to practise directly her feelings were aroused; and the practice remained when the feelings had subsided. The soul of religion was sleeping, but it was not dead. Her prayers were still said more carefully, and her Bible was regularly read. Work was also undertaken at the children's lessons, instead of desultory writing or reading; and this habit of submitting to a law, though one imposed by herself, was the germ of that obedience which she afterwards paid to a higher authority upon higher principles.

CHAPTER IX.

Mrs. St. Aubyn was during this week more constant than ever in her visits to the Grove; and notwithstanding Margaret's weariness in her society, she could not be insensible to her kindness.

If however she had been envious, her bad feelings would have been easily awakened; for whatever attentions were bestowed, Agatha was clearly their origin and object. Her taste was consulted, her opinion required; and Margaret, though listened to politely, was placed completely in the back-ground. Colonel Clive frequently accompanied his sister, and there could be no doubt of the attraction; but Margaret was still unsuspicious. His manners were stiff, and his irritability scarcely hidden by his marked preference of everything with which Agatha was connected. He was a man grown prematurely old — without occupation, and having no taste for literature, and subject in consequence to perpetual fits of ennui. He had sold out of the army, and, not understanding country pursuits, entrusted the care of his property to a bailiff; contented in the mean time to enjoy the rental, and spend his time in driving about Staunton, and paying visits with his sister. His great talent lay in finding fault, and this, with his defect of temper, made his society so unpleasant, that Margaret's delight even in her French journey was occasionally damped by knowing that he would be of the party. She was obliged frequently to remind herself that the plan was of his contriving, and that it was ungrateful to wish him away; but Agatha required no reminding. A curious blindness appeared suddenly to have affected her mental perceptions. She did occasionally yawn and express herself very weary after an hour's conversation with the Colonel upon the weather, and the state of the roads, and who had been seen, and who had not been seen; but if a remark upon her fatigue were made, she had no fault to find. It was not Colonel Clive; he had talked a great deal, and very agreeably; but the day was warm, or she had been up late the night before: an excuse was always ready; and if she could not make it, her mother could. Mrs. Percival did not at first know what she was doing, for she seldom realised her own projects, and had formed no particular scheme for her daughter's marriage. But she liked the acquaintance with Mrs. St. Aubyn;

and she was glad to have it said that a man of fortune and consideration, like Colonel Clive, was fascinated by Agatha's beauty. It was vanity which made her at first cultivate the acquaintance, and it was her subjection to the world, and the world's opinion, which induced her to soften down any unfavourable opinion she might entertain, and place Mrs. St. Aubyn and her brother in the most advantageous point of view, whenever they were made the subjects of conversation. If, when originally introduced to them, she had been asked whether Colonel Clive was a person likely to make Agatha happy in marriage, she would have ridiculed the idea. The great disparity of age and his glaring defects of temper would then have stood prominently forward; but it was her interest to overlook them, and to dwell only upon the advantages of his wealth and position, and unintentionally she was teaching her daughter to do the same.

There is a government of sight for girls of nineteen as well as for children of nine. The generality of minds are formed, not by reading or advice, but by the events which pass before their eyes, and the opinions which are expressed concerning them. Agatha Percival read that it was folly and sin to undertake the most solemn engagement of life without feelings of affection and respect. Even the most trifling novel told her something of this truth. Her father warned her that she was not to listen to the silly flatteries which were constantly poured into her ear, and her mother gave her formal lectures upon the importance of marriage, and the care and consideration which ought to be exercised before entering upon it. No one said to her that wealth was "the one thing needful;" but many said it before her, and, as must almost invariably happen, Agatha turned from the instructions immediately addressed to herself, and eagerly gathered in the passing observations, which, like straws upon the surface of a river, show the direction of the current beneath. At her father's dinner table especially, when the topics of the day were brought forward, she heard Colonel Clive envied; and she saw that his riches gave him, in the opinion of her family, a position which he could never have gained by his virtues or his intellect. She observed that Mrs. St. Aubyn's decision was held to be oracular,—that a visit from her was the great event of the day. Of what use could it be to be told that the goods of this world are of secondary consequence, when everything about her contradicted the assertion? Agatha heard every one wishing for money, and of course she learned to think that it was the perfection of human desires. But she was not the only person injured by this low tone of con-

versation. The effect which dinner-table discussions have upon the characters of those engaged in them may sometimes be seen, and perhaps corrected; but the effect upon the characters of the servants who listen to them is scarcely ever considered.

Mrs. Percival's household heard at church that they were to set their affections "on things above, not on things on the earth;" but they heard on their return home exactly the reverse; not always openly stated, but implied so as not to admit of a mistake. Yet Mrs. Percival never for an instant imagined that her servants could have learned anything but good from a residence under her roof. And so it is even when the same wishes are expressed carelessly, though from better motives. We may intend to employ our riches for good; but our servants only know that we are longing for them; and if we desire that which our Lord has warned us is a temptation so great as to involve the risk of our eternal salvation, how can we expect but that they will cherish the same inclinations?

The week went swiftly by, and the views which were rapidly maturing in Agatha's mind were unknown, and if they had been perceived would have remained uncensured. All the necessary preparations for the journey were made, and the thoughts of the whole family were directed to the pleasure which Agatha and Margaret were anticipating. Margaret was particularly glad that it had come just at this moment, for there were two things which might otherwise have caused her uneasiness: one was her uncle's departure. He had paid, for him, a very long visit; and it had been more delightful to her than any other, although little more had been said on either side upon the subject which had occupied them on the first day of meeting. Mr. Sutherland was happy in seeing, from Margaret's conduct, that his words had taken some root; and Margaret felt a daily increasing pleasure in his society as she found herself more able to understand his prevailing habits of thought. "I shall expect you to examine the churches well for my sake," he said, as he stood with his horse's bridle in his hand, whilst Margaret was begging him to come to them immediately upon her return, in order to hear all that she had seen. "Upon the whole I think I am glad you are not going farther this time. You will not be tempted to hurry over Rouen."

"I shall not understand what to admire, I am afraid," said Margaret.

"Yes, you will,—you must. Taste is innate; and I am sure you have a love of the beautiful in all things."

"Moral as well as intellectual, I hope," said Margaret, with a sweet smile. "I shall see nothing I like anywhere as I do the sight of Prince's head, when I know you are upon his back."

Mr. Sutherland held out his hand in answer. "Good-bye, my dear child; you may be sure I shall come if possible;" and, mounting his horse, he gave one more parting glance at Margaret, who was standing in the doorway, and rode off. Margaret returned to her employment with a heavy heart, and her other grievances seemed more weighty. Her father had that morning received a letter from Craven owning the embarrassments which he had before hinted to her. Margaret understood this by a few words which fell from Dr. Percival as he was reading it; and after breakfast she was called into the study to confess all that she knew of the affair. This was little enough; but Dr. Percival, when once excited to anger, was not a man to listen to reason. He complained of Craven, and prophesied that he would be the ruin of his family; and there being no one else present, Margaret came in for a share of his indignation. "She should have told before,—she was her brother's confidante, and she ought to put a stop to such extravagance. If she did not, the day would come when she would bitterly rue it." Margaret had learned by former experience the best mode of conducting herself on such occasions. Excuses would but add fuel to the fire, so she remained patient and silent, till the ebullition of anger had subsided, and then, saying that she was very sorry for having vexed him, asked if she might go to the school-room, as the children were waiting for her. Dr. Percival growled an assent, and Margaret left him in the hope that when they again met the storm would have subsided. She had made, however, one discovery in the course of the conversation, which, though it did not rest upon her mind whilst engaged in the morning studies, returned disagreeably after her uncle was gone. Craven had implied to her that his debts did not amount to much more than a hundred pounds; he had sent to his father for three. No wonder that Dr. Percival was angry; and this was not the first offence; similar applications had been made several times before, not perhaps to the same amount, but still sufficient to show that his very handsome allowance was not enough for his expensive habits. Three hundred pounds was a large sum, and Margaret saw no probability of a reformation. Craven had from childhood been generous and reckless. His fine countenance and popular manners had gained him friends wherever he went, and he was unable to forego any extravagance which the world pronounced distinctive of a gentle-

man. Margaret saw in the distance a constant source of anxiety in her brother's folly; and even the recollection that George, at Eton, was steady and high-principled, and had brought himself frequently into notice by his superior attainments, did not soothe her ruffled spirits. The prospect of her foreign expedition was more efficacious than reason. She would at least have a week free from home cares, and by that time her father would have recovered the shock. In the mean time she resolved again to dismiss the subject from her thoughts, and to forget, if possible, that the remembrance of Craven was associated with anything but pleasure.

The carriage which was to convey the travellers to Southampton was punctually at the door at nine o'clock on the morning but one after Mr. Sutherland's departure. There was rather a long journey before them, and they would require some rest at the end of it, as they were to cross at night, and Dr. Percival foretold but little sleep for any one. The day, however, promised well: it was cool, bright, and perfectly calm. Mrs. St. Aubyn and the Colonel were experienced voyagers, and cared little for annoyances, and there was certainly every prospect of a short and agreeable passage. Margaret stepped into the carriage with a light heart. She had provided herself with sufficient resources against hours of ennui in her companions, or the weariness of a rainy day at a French hotel; and whatever might happen in the way of discomfort, she was sure of being contented. One or two books, a sketching block, and some work, armed her against all the minor evils of life. There are few sensations more agreeable than those produced on the first outset of a journey on a summer's morning by the rapid wheel of a carriage, as it bears us along through the clear atmosphere, giving a feeling of exhilaration to the spirits, and a sense of power to the mind. Let the country be mountainous or flat, woody or barren, known or unknown, for the first half hour it will but little signify. The early morning air, if our minds are disengaged, is sufficient for our enjoyment, and the fact that we are leaving the scenes to which we have been accustomed, invests them with the charm of novelty. We view them under a different aspect, and look upon them with the curious eye of an indifferent spectator. Even the familiar faces which may chance to present themselves, are not the same. Their insipid round of hopes and fears has for the time ceased to be ours, the source of their contentment is a subject of speculation, and we notice them with a smile or a bow, under which is concealed a feeling of triumph that our circle of interests is not to be

contracted like theirs. Margaret had never viewed the town of Staunton with so much of charity. She looked out for Miss Debrett's little mansion, standing back from the road in a small neat garden, and was amused to see Jenkins at the wicket gate, evidently stationed to give notice of their approach. She leaned forward as they passed the door, and waved her hand, for Miss Debrett's head appeared above the window-blind, and she was desirous to give the signs of recognition which she knew would be treasured up and recounted at least half a dozen times in the course of the day. Even the sight of Mr. Drayton, putting up in his window the ribbons which had once attracted Miss Debrett's curiosity, created a certain interest; and the civil bow of Mr. Locke, the stationer, was most graciously received. Margaret had not before realised the extent of sympathy which is unconsciously given to all the persons and objects connected with our common life. The party was a cheerful one, and even when the first twenty miles were passed there was no appearance of a diminution of enjoyment. All had for the time being attained their wishes, and for once all were satisfied; and fatigue was so little thought of, that after a journey of fifty miles both Margaret and her sister would willingly have escaped a five-o'clock dinner and an hour's rest, and proceeded at once to the packet. As the moment for treading the shores of another country drew near, all things belonging to England grew tiresome. Agatha was in a passive state of felicity, receiving Colonel Clive's attentions, and amused without exertion. If life could be spent in travelling, she thought he might make a very endurable companion.

The miseries of a sea voyage, however short, and under whatever circumstances of fair winds and calm waters, need no description. On the present occasion they were fewer than usual. Margaret sat upon deck until quite late gazing on the brilliancy of the stars and the reflection of the moonbeams on the water, without any wish for conversation, and lost in the vague reveries which the novelty of her position occasioned. Mrs. St. Aubyn's entreaties at length persuaded her, though unwillingly, to go into the cabin, and the next nine or ten hours were passed in that dreamy, disturbed, uncomfortable state which is the very best that can ever be expected in such a situation. The dim morning light breaking through the port-holes of the cabin awoke the passengers from their uneasy slumbers. The voyage had been unusually short, and they were then within sight of Havre. Margaret longed to be on deck, but it was some time before she could persuade Mrs. St. Aubyn that it was really a matter of interest to

her to watch the entrance of the vessel into the harbour. Mrs. St. Aubyn had seen it so often herself, that for her it had no charm; but when Agatha added her petitions to her sister's, the request was immediately acceded to. It was a strange sight which greeted Margaret's eye, as she stood looking over the side of the vessel. The narrow harbour, or rather basin, which they were entering, shut in by the old grey walls of the fortifications —the massive round tower of Francis the First, standing as a guard to the port—the tall houses with curious gable ends and projections, looking ghostly in the cold morning light—the broad quay, and the trading vessels and barges lying motionless on the water, their masts appearing to mingle with the chimneys of the houses;—all were in singular contrast with the red brick stiffness and squareness of an English town. There were but few people moving about, in consequence of the earliness of the hour, but the gens-d'armes soon came on board to perform their usual office; and the representatives of the different hotels, standing on the quay, vied with each other in extolling, with all the eagerness of French gesticulation, the attraction of their different houses. Margaret's amusement at all she saw was exhibited more by her quick eye and pleased smile than by any open expression. Two of her companions did not in the least enter into her delight, and Agatha seemed more engrossed in collecting her cloak, shawl, reticule, and et-ceteras, than in making remarks upon the scene before her. Even the lady's-maid was an experienced traveller, so that Margaret seemed quite alone in her surprise. The landing, the search at the custom-house, and the short walk to the hotel, were soon over; soon, at least, to Margaret's feelings, for where everything was new, nothing was tedious; and in half an hour's time she found herself seated in a neat, uncarpeted room, comfortably furnished with a soft sofa, crimson cushioned chairs, and a splendid gilt clock; and quite ready for the coffee, and long rolls of bread, and fresh eggs and butter, which were set before her. True, the room had, when they first saw it, contained a bed, and a dingy piece of untidy carpet had been spread upon the ground; but the uncoated waiter, and the agile femme-de-chambre, had, with a speed resembling that of Aladdin and the African magician, rolled up the bedding, and carried away the light frame on which it rested, and, after kicking aside the carpet, contrived, by means of a huge scrubbing-brush, to give an additional polish to the dusty floor; and by the time the party were ready for breakfast the apartment had assumed the form of a respectable salon. Colonel Clive's countenance

brightened under the influence of comfort and a plentiful repast. Since his landing, even Agatha's smiles had failed to keep him in good-humour. Personal discomfort had roused his native irritability; he had quarrelled with the gens-d'armes, abused the custom-house officers, and called the garçon who waited on him "a lazy rascal," for having delayed to bring up his portmanteau, an epithet received with a polite bow and a "Oui, Monsieur, certainement." The Colonel's knowledge of French was not co-extensive with his feelings; he could be amiable, but not angry; and the unfortunate waiter escaped without any further demonstration of enmity, except a low growl. Margaret was an attentive observer of the scene; it was the first specimen of the reported ill-temper, and it was not satisfactory. Agatha did not appear struck by it; she was looking out of the window, watching the departure of a French diligence, and no wonder that her attention was pre-occupied. To English eyes what can be more surprising than the ordinary public conveyance of our polished neighbours? A chariot, a small omnibus, and the body of a stage coach, surmounted by a rickety London cab, with a projecting head, forming but one machine, on which are piled boxes, hampers, bags, baskets, packages, all the provisions for the wants, imaginary and unimaginary, of the fifteen or sixteen human beings who are located in the different divisions of the cumbrous vehicle; the whole committed to the charge of a grizzly-faced countryman, in a blue smock-frock, who, armed with a long whip, directs the irregular movements of five, six, seven, sometimes nine, or even eleven unmannerly cart horses, linked together by ropes. That a body so ponderous should ever have been invented, is a great marvel; that it should ever have been put in motion, is a greater; but the greatest of all is, that by any art of skill in the driver, or instinct in the horses, it should be brought in safety to the place of its destination. Margaret was rather inclined to try what such a mode of travelling would be like, and half regretted that a carriage was to be engaged for the next day, especially as she had heard that the coupé was by no means to be despised: but Agatha laughed at the idea, and reminded her that they were a party of four. The number recalled Margaret's thoughts to the Colonel and his temper, but she was certain Agatha could not have noticed it, and when in the course of the day she repeated what had passed, and asked her sister if she did not think that the world had spoken truly, Agatha differed entirely,—the gens-d'armes, the custom-house officers, the waiter, might be in fault, but not Colonel Clive.

Certainly she had no reason to think him so. The whole of that day was devoted to her gratification. A look, a wish, the slightest expression of inclination, was seized upon and immediately carried into execution. Margaret saw it all, at least with her bodily eye; but even then she was mentally blind. In England she had been simple-minded and abstracted; in France her attention was otherwise engaged. Whatever was proposed, whatever was done, she was equally satisfied. It signified little that she merely received common civilities; she had no thought to bestow upon them. It was scarcely wearisome to be so much with Mrs. St. Aubyn; she wanted no conversation; her feelings were those of intense pleasure; every street, and house, and church,—every person who went by, whether man, woman, or child,—was a source of amusement. From the glittering plumage of the foreign birds exposed for sale in the shops upon the quay, to the dingy offices of the Bureau de Police, and the picturesque village of Ingouville, with its comfortable châteaux and pretty gardens, all were charming. She could scarcely tell which afforded her the greatest gratification, the Rue de Paris, full of bustle and activity, or the beauty of the extensive view from the hill commanding the town and harbour, the mouth of the Seine, and the headland of Cap La Hève. Even the walk in the evening on the pier by the baths of Frascati was full of enjoyment. The people assembled were of no very distinguished rank; but the French middle classes are as courteous and almost as elegant in manner as their superiors; the very tone of their voices was a novelty, and as Margaret watched the English steamer, crowded with passengers, pass out of the harbour, and thought of the weary night of discomfort, and the home cares to which they might be returning, in contrast with the pleasures which awaited herself, her heart bounded with delight. Mrs. St. Aubyn's good-nature was quite satisfied by her enthusiasm, and her manner grew more and more cordial. Besides, Agatha had now but little attention to give her, and Margaret's vivacity was amusing, and took away any sensation of loneliness. She kissed her, for the first time, when they separated at night, and, with a meaning smile, whispered, "that it was fortunate they had decided upon a party of four; three would have been, decidedly, one too many."

CHAPTER X.

Mrs. St. Aubyn's last words were the first which had made any real impression upon Margaret with regard to Colonel Clive's attachment to her sister. They gave a reality to what had before appeared a mere fancy of the moment. She pitied him, grieved for the disappointment which, she believed, was in store for him, and almost wished that the journey had not been proposed. It would, she knew, be impossible to put a stop to any increase of intimacy now; whereas, at home, it might have been easy. She thought of speaking to Agatha; but there was something repugnant to her taste, in suggesting the idea, if her sister was not prepared for it: perhaps it might be fancy, after all; and unable to decide what would be the right step, and therefore fearful of taking any, she satisfied herself, after some scruple and deliberation, by deciding that the affair was beyond her reach; and that at Colonel Clive's age, and with his selfish disposition (for selfish she was certain it was, notwithstanding his one instance of liberality), the pain he might receive by the discovery of Agatha's indifference was not likely to be very lasting. There was rather less of light-heartedness in her feelings when she awoke the next morning: the ghost of care seemed to have followed her even to a foreign country; but it was not one which would bear the vivacity and activity of a French town, or the arrangements for the day's journey; and by the time the carriage, which had been taken for the week, was at the door, Margaret was as much diverted as ever, and as little mindful of Colonel Clive or anything he might be thinking or saying. This evening they were to be in Rouen, the place which, from childhood, had aroused her imagination more than any other,—more, even, than Paris, or Naples, or even Rome, for it was associated with some highly wrought, fantastic tales, which, at stray moments, when released from lessons, she had read and re-read till they were known by heart, and the descriptions pictured before her mind's eye.

If the termination of the journey was delightful, the road which led to it was scarcely less so. Variety, if not beauty, met her at every turn. There were square, formal châteaux, with iron entrance gates, and long avenues, and little groves of trees, standing like green spots in the desert in the middle of uninclosed fields; low, ivy-covered cottages, picturesque to the beholder, however uncomfortable to the inhabitants; steep banks, and

wooded hills; and many a peep of the lovely river, sometimes flowing placidly by them, and then tracing its winding course far away in the distance. Each town and village had something to render it remarkable. Harfleur, with the graceful tapering spire of its beautiful church; — Lillebonne, carrying the fancy back to the time when the shows of the Romans were exhibited in the amphitheatre, still seen distinctly on the side of the hill; and, again, recalling the days when in the old feudal castle, now in ruins, the proud Duke of Normandy assembled his barons to unfold to them the project of the conquest of England;—Caudebec, standing on the very margin of the transparent Seine, and enlivened by groups of Normandy peasants holding a fair under the elms which skirted the river; — Duclair, built under a range of low cliffs, with apartments cut out of the rock; and at length, a scene, which induced even Mrs. St. Aubyn to stand up in the carriage, that she might see it to advantage — the first view of Rouen from the hill of Canteleu. There lay the city spread out beneath them; its churches, streets, manufactories, public buildings, "dimmed by the touch of centuries," crowding the banks of the Seine, whose blue waters wound through the rich valley, and were lost amid the projecting hills which terminated the horizon. Proudly, in the centre, rose the grey front of the cathedral, and, beyond, inferior in rank, but surpassing in beauty, the gorgeous church of St. Ouen; whilst around them were grouped the towers and spires of the smaller churches, throwing a tranquil, religious aspect over a place, which from its well-known commerce and manufactories, and the sight of the barges, trading vessels, and steam-boats passing upon the river, might otherwise have suggested ideas of this world only.

Margaret's ecstasy was a silent one: she disliked expressing pleasure which would be shared in word and not in spirit. Agatha, however, said all that was required; her spirits were gayer than usual, and if her feeling was less deep than her sister's, it was at least fully equal to Colonel Clive's expectations, and his selfishness was for the time quite overcome. He was happy, delighted; no journey had ever afforded him half the enjoyment; and as they descended the hill, he became animated and agreeable, and even exerted himself to point out whatever was most striking. The carriage drove through the Boulevards into the narrow streets, and on a near approach Margaret was a little disappointed. The interesting parts of the city were more in the centre, and the broad quay, though very handsome, was too regular to suit her ideas of Rouen. She was, however, in no humour to criticise, and but

objects of attention for all: and when the preliminaries of the repast have been gone through,—when the potage has disappeared, and the succession of entrées begins, there is little time left for any remarks except speculations upon the dishes which are handed round. Margaret, however, had more leisure than any one else. She had no appetite, for the room was oppressively hot, and she was wearied with the journey. Mrs. St. Aubyn still looked annoyed; but she professed herself pleased to be again partaking of a well-cooked French dinner; and Margaret hoped that Agatha might easily obtain forgiveness. She was longing herself for the moment of release, and vexed that she could not more thoroughly enjoy the scene. Her own party were silent, and the observations made by other persons near her were desultory and uninteresting. One only, heard accidentally in a sudden lull, attracted her notice. It was made by a gentleman opposite, to a very pleasing-mannered English lady, who was sitting next him.

"Then the report is authentic;—but she will never live at Henningsley."

The name was unnatural in that company of strangers. Margaret could almost have asked why they presumed to speak of it,—a place which she had almost fancied her own. She listened for the reply, but it was lost. The gentleman began again—

"To-day did you say?—but who told you?"

'A letter from herself. I am here to meet her."

'Strange—not credible from any other source," Margaret heard, and something about Italian enthusiasm, and then the name of Lady Anstruther; but Mrs. St. Aubyn rose to leave the table, and she was compelled to follow. She gave one glance at the party, determined if possible to recognise them again, and discover who they were. The few sentences which she had caught showed at once the subject of their conversation; and as Margaret reverted to Henningsley, and the difference which its occupation would make in her ordinary life, she experienced some irritation against the innocent cause of her expected privation—the Countess Novera. As they went up stairs, she was endeavouring to recall more exactly what had been said, when the loud cracking of postillions' whips, and the heavy rumbling of wheels, announced an arrival. Mrs. St. Aubyn hastened them into the salon, and Agatha's curiosity led her instantly to the window. An open carriage with four horses (in France a sign, not of the rank and wealth, but of the number of the travellers), stood before the entrance of the hotel; but only one person was in it; the others had already alighted. Agatha had scarcely time to describe a young-looking

girl, curiously dressed, very un-English, when she also vanished. A bustle in the hotel followed, much greater than usual;—the rushing to and fro of waiters;—the slamming of doors;—more like the excitement of an English inn, than the quietness of a French one, where there are so many separate suites of apartments. It was a distant sound at first, but presently it came nearer. The salon next their own was apparently to be appropriated to the strangers. Agatha was sure they were not French; she had heard one of them speak as they passed. Margaret remembered the words "to-day" which she had heard at the table-d'hôte; it might be the Countess and her party. Her curiosity was roused, and she applied to Agatha for a further description of the person she had seen. Agatha laughed at her sudden interest, and was still more amused when it was explained. Colonel Clive looked from the window to examine the carriage, and pronounced it to be old and badly built; as for the horses, they, as every one knew, went for nothing in France: a tinker, if he travelled post, with his wife and children, would be compelled to have the same. He knew nothing of the Countess Novera; nothing of the English people at the table-d'hôte; but he was certain no lady of rank would travel in that style.

Margaret was silenced, — how could she be otherwise? — by such a dogmatic assertion; yet her curiosity still remained, and when Mrs. St. Aubyn proposed that they should go into the town, just to gain some notion of what it was like before it grew dark, she lingered behind, in the hope of hearing some sound from the adjoining room. But all was still. A waiter stood at the door as they were leaving the hotel, and Margaret would have inquired of him whether the Countess Novera had arrived, if she had not been too shy, besides fearing to attract the observation of some foreign servants who were lounging near, and who might belong to the Countess's suite. She went on, following Colonel Clive and her sister, and not even expressing to Mrs. St. Aubyn the wish which was in her mind; and in the pleasure of the first inspection of Rouen, soon forgot everything else. They walked along the quay, striking from its broad road and lofty houses, some standing back and having a row of trees in front, and all looking grey and quaint, and totally unlike an English commercial town; and, leaving the river and the beautiful suspension bridge, they turned into the narrow streets, and were soon in the centre of the city. Margaret asked where they were going. Colonel Clive scarcely knew. There was the Palais de Justice, the Hôtel Bourgtheroude, the Place de la Pucelle, the Tour de la Grosse

Horloge; perhaps the last was the best hint: it was too late really to see anything; they would just walk through the streets, and leave lionising for the next day. Margaret mentioned the cathedral, but no one seconded the wish to see it.

Street after street was passed; all dirty, all narrow, all picturesque, beyond Margaret's most vivid imagination. Overhanging gables, in some parts nearly meeting at the top, carved cornices and ornamented doorways;—the archway of the Tour de la Grosse Horloge, forming a frame as it were for a picture which she longed to sketch: and then the people — women of the lower ranks walking about with neat white caps instead of bonnets; men with scull caps, red or brown, as the taste might be; boys with blue smock frocks, girls with no covering for the head except that bestowed by nature; occasionally, a man with long ear-rings — once, a woman wearing a man's night-cap; and at length, — a sight which Margaret had long coveted, — a real Normandy cap, not merely the pointed sugar-loaf, which was worn by many, but an elevation — a tower of stiff perpendicular muslin, adorned with ribbons, and having two depending flaps or wings, and forming the crowning ornament of the dress of a stout and stately dame, who in a black silk gown, enlivened by two gold chains, walked as quickly as her dignity would allow along the crowded streets. Margaret's delight would have been rapturous if she had had any one to share it. Havre, much as she had enjoyed it, was a mere nothing when compared with the charm of Rouen. Her wish also of seeing the cathedral was in a measure gratified; for upon reaching the extremity of the Rue Grand Port, they stood directly in front of it. Colonel Clive remarked that it was a fine church, they would examine it to-morrow; and on he went; Margaret entreated Mrs. St. Aubyn to stay, that she might look at it only for one minute: it was the first cathedral she had ever seen,—if she might only examine it—only study the carving, the figures, the proportions,—it was so much grander than she had imagined any building could be. Mrs. St. Aubyn smiled, and told her she would have had enough of churches after she had spent two days in Rouen, and hastened her forwards. Margaret could not think so. The splendid building seemed to hallow every object around it. Her uncle had spoken lightly of it, or at least he had not considered it the first object of attention, and yet it seemed then as if nothing could surpass it.

As the thought crossed her, she saw Colonel Clive and Agatha once more stop. It was before another church, a cathedral also in size, less rich in carving and decorations, and bearing some

traces of incompleteness, — as is the case with many of the most beautiful Continental churches, — yet exquisite in its proportions; and in purity of style, and delicacy of taste (especially displayed in the open arches, and tracery of the central tower), far superior, even to Margaret's unpractised eye, to the florid elaborateness of the cathedral. "St. Ouen," said Mrs. St. Aubyn: but Margaret did not require to be told, she knew at once what it must be; and before a wish to see the interior could be expressed, Colonel Clive and Agatha entered.

Mrs. St. Aubyn seemed surprised, but made no objection to follow them. The door was pushed aside; and with a greater degree of reverence than of curiosity, Margaret advanced into the church. The shadows of evening were fast gathering around, and the extremities of the long aisles and transepts were shrouded in obscurity; but before her, the graceful pillars of the nave, their moulded piers unbroken by capitals, rose up into the vaulted roof; whilst beyond them were mingled arches and columns, altars and chapels, some dark and scarcely to be distinguished, others touched by the light of the dying day, as its mellowed rays shone mistily through the deep yet gorgeous colours of the windows. A few figures were scattered about the building, but none were moving. Kneeling before the shrine of the Virgin or the image of a favourite saint, they were apparently absorbed in devotion; and, except the distant murmur of the world's cares, which reached even to that temple of God, no sound fell upon the ear, save from the farthest end of the south transept, where, before an illuminated altar which shed a flickering light upon the bases of the pillars near, a priest was chanting an evening service. Margaret stood motionless: she thought of nothing — observed nothing — her whole soul was absorbed in a feeling of intense awe.

Mrs. St. Aubyn approached, and motioned her to go forward; but Margaret objected, for she could not bear to intrude farther into the presence of those whom she believed to be engaged in worshipping their Maker. If it were not so, if idolatry had entered that holy temple, if the corruptions of man's invention had defiled the dwelling-place of the Most High, to Margaret's eye it was not then visible. She saw others in the attitude of prayer, and she felt herself cold and even irreverent in comparison. She could not make them objects of amusement; and, whispering to her companion to leave her, she remained leaning against one of the pillars of the nave, until the circuit of the church had been rapidly made; and then, regardless of Agatha's look of surprise at her want of curiosity, silently took Mrs. St. Aubyn's arm, and

the party emerged again into the open air. What a contrast presented itself! The evening had darkened, and the lamps in the streets and the shops were lighted. The signs of business had disappeared; and in their stead, the search after amusement seemed the occupation to which all had given themselves. Yet it was not a search — amusement was at hand for all: hardly a voice was heard except in tones of merriment, and few faces were seen unlighted by a smile. Of the rich there appeared scarcely any; but amongst the inferior orders, the petty tradespeople, the porters, the peasants, the servants, the ragged children even, who thronged the narrow streets, one spirit alone prevailed. The Rue Grand Port was a scene of enchantment; the lower portion of the grotesque irregular street was resplendent, as if purposely illuminated, — the chemists, grocers, picture-dealers, toymen, had all displayed their wares to the fullest advantage; but the windows of the pastry-cooks, filled with fantastic ornaments and glittering with bonbons, surpassed all others. The light which in a wider street would have been lost, was here concentrated and reflected; and between the opposite rows of illuminations passed the gay groups, who were refreshing themselves after the labours of the day; whilst above, in the dark narrow line of sky left between the projecting roofs, shone the pale pure stars of heaven, like angels looking from afar in sadness and silence upon the vain stir, and transitory pleasures of this lower world. Margaret's eye wandered delighted over the scene, but not with the same careless enjoyment which she might have experienced an hour before. Graver thoughts had sprung up; and though she could gaze upon and admire it, as the "spectacle" of a theatre, she could not enter into it as reality. She could scarcely imagine that others did. St. Ouen in its exquisite beauty, its "soft religious gloom," was still present to her, and the sparkling gaiety which surrounded her seemed visionary. The distance was short to the hotel, but after walking through one or two of the smaller streets, Agatha complained of being tired, and Colonel Clive insisted upon engaging a "fiacre," and as they drove along the quay, Margaret was glad that he had been peremptory. A crowd had collected before the hotel, very orderly and quiet, and brought together only by two military bands, which were playing in the open air in honour of a grand dinner given by a general officer. Still it was a crowd, and Margaret had a great dislike to one, and a nervous dread of being crushed. The people separated easily as the "fiacre" drove up to the door, and in a few minutes afterwards Margaret was seated in the balcony, gazing upon the river, in

which both the stars and the lights from the opposite quay were clearly mirrored, refreshing herself with coffee, and listening to the full tones of the wind instruments, which gave a depth of expression to the favourite Italian airs that followed each other in rapid succession. The calmness of the night, and the beauty of the music, had a charm for others besides Margaret; and the sound of voices in the adjoining salon, the windows of which opened like their own upon the balcony, recalled her former curiosity. The murmur was indistinct, and it was not easy to tell what language was spoken. Margaret moved her chair, with no idea of approaching nearer to the strangers, but in order to be beyond the reach of a conversation between her sister and Colonel Clive, which the music had no effect in stopping. The neighbouring balcony was empty, or she would have remained stationary in her first position; but she had scarcely been seated two minutes, when the band stopped for a few instants, and she fancied she recognised the voice of the lady who had dined with them at the table-d'hôte, suggesting that it was foolish to remain in the room, they had much better remove into the open air. The answer was given in the voice and accent of a foreigner; gentle and melodious beyond any tones which Margaret had ever heard. The words were English, but not the idiom; and immediately afterwards there was a faint laugh, and in the soft delicious language of Italy the stranger agreed to the proposal, and stepped forward. Margaret moved away, notwithstanding her curiosity she could not turn to look; but her dress caught in the railing, and whilst endeavouring to disentangle it, her eye involuntarily rested upon the countenance of the foreigner. The glance was startling. A stranger she certainly was; an Italian from her dress, and manner, and voice, yet her features seemed as familiar to Margaret's eye as if they had been present to her from childhood. She knew the oval form of the face, the full forehead, the glossy dark chestnut hair, the deep set lustrous eye and long nose, and especially the peculiar expression of the small mouth, with its short upper lip, and sweet smile, and yet the trace of something determined and even proud beneath. For an instant Margaret was so confused that she forgot the awkwardness of her position, and gazed intently upon the tall elegant figure standing almost close at her side; but the lady turned suddenly round, and their eyes met; and as the colour rushed to Margaret's cheek, and she hastened to re-enter the salon, she remembered the picture in the dining-room at Henningsley. There was no more doubt; she had seen the Countess Novera. The effect upon her feelings was instantaneous.

She almost feared to look again lest the resemblance which had so forcibly struck her should appear less vivid ; but the sweet voice and the soft Italian accent met her ear, and drew her again into the balcony. This time she had but a passing glimpse, for the Countess and her friends left it almost immediately. The bands ceased to play ; the crowd dispersed quickly ; and Colonel Clive and Agatha, finding their conversation no longer private, withdrew also into the salon.

CHAPTER XI.

Time is certainly not to be measured by days and hours, at least if we consult our own sensations. That day had been one of the longest of Margaret Percival's uneventful life. She had seen, heard, thought, and felt so much, her mind had been in such a perpetual state of transition, she could with difficulty tell what had gratified her most. St. Ouen she would have said, but for the lovely apparition (it seemed scarcely more real) of the Countess Novera. The remembrance of the church in its awful solemnity would never be entirely obliterated, but it would fade away tint after tint, until at length nothing would remain but that strange, incomprehensible memory of a feeling, which is so deep a mystery of our nature. The Countess was to return to the neighbourhood of her own home for a season at least ; she was to dwell amidst the same scenes, to enjoy the same beauties, to be in a manner connected with her daily life, yet shut out from and superior to it. There would be something constantly to keep alive the interest which she had already inspired. Even to hear of her and meet her occasionally would add a charm to the common routine of existence ; and it was possible that circumstances might bring them to a more intimate knowledge of each other. In the enthusiasm of the moment, having had no experience of disappointment, Margaret flattered herself that in such an acquaintance she should find all that she could desire to make her life agreeable. The Countess was immediately invested with every virtue and every talent, and Margaret lay down to sleep with a face of beauty and a voice of melody haunting her dreams, and mingling strangely and confusedly with the shadowy outlines, and the solemn tones of the church and the service of St. Ouen. Agatha slept, also ; but her last waking thoughts were in little accordance with her

sister's. Of the Countess Novera she knew and thought nothing; Margaret had not chosen to communicate her discovery, fearing the observations which might be made. Of St. Ouen she thought still less: it was a splendid church, but the darkness had prevented her from seeing much of it; it was curious to observe the people kneeling about, but she supposed they were only repeating a set of words, so there was no fear of disturbing them; and the tones of the Gregorian chant might be beautiful to those who liked the style of thing, but to her ear they were extremely monotonous. More engrossing subjects now demanded her attention — the luxurious comfort of Ashington Court, and the superiority of position and increase of wealth which she would derive from consenting to be the wife of Colonel Clive. The question had not been actually put, but she could not doubt that it was coming. The Colonel's manner during the day, and some observations dropped in the course of the long conversation in the balcony, had convinced her of it. He seemed only waiting to be quite certain of success before he ventured upon his proposal. Agatha knew that a very slight encouragement would bring him to the desired point, yet she hesitated. Cold she was, and selfish and worldly; but she was very young, and coldness does not imply absolute insensibility. At a distance she had thought it might be very desirable to marry a person possessed of so many advantages; but as the prospect drew nearer, other ideas forced themselves upon her mind. She had never dreamt of loving Colonel Clive; that she knew was impossible: but there was a lurking feeling totally the opposite to love which now and then made its presence acknowledged. When Margaret complained of his temper, or the world laughed at his stupidity, Agatha was silent; not because she did not agree, but because she agreed too well. With the consciousness of what might in all probability be her future destiny (for it was many weeks since she had first become certain of her power), she did not choose to acknowledge how fully she was alive to the deficiencies of the man who might soon become her husband.

She saw them all plainly, painfully. Her perceptions were quick, her taste was naturally good, and refined by education; but she had a strong calculating mind and low principles; and the struggle now was between the desire to raise herself in the world, and the dread of linking herself for life to a man whom she could neither love nor respect. Agatha went to bed almost resolved that the final step should never be taken; she awoke in the morning, doubtful and uneasy, — so uneasy that Margaret

remarked it and thought she was ill. The very idea seemed to rouse her sister's self-command; she shook off all appearance of languor, talked fast and gaily; and before the breakfast was ready, Margaret's suspicions were dispelled. The day was to be devoted to sight-seeing, with the exception of the first hour after breakfast, which Colonel Clive was obliged to give to business, and the rest of the party to letter-writing. Margaret had promised that her uncle should hear from her, and fancied she should have no difficulty in telling him all that she had seen and felt; but she was not in the humour for description; and besides, descriptions were always tiresome; and the idea which was then uppermost in her mind, was one in which he would have no sympathy. He would smile if she spoke to him of a foreigner, a perfect stranger, instead of the beauties of Rouen. Yet her thoughts were frequently reverting to this latter subject, and having learnt accidentally from the waiter that the party in the next salon were to set off for Havre early in the afternoon, her chief wish was to gain one more glimpse of the Countess before her departure. But there seemed a fatality against her. Colonel Clive's business was despatched sooner than he expected, and they were hurried out, and were not likely to return till late. Margaret gave up the hope, and tried to think that it did not signify, as they should probably soon meet often. Agatha's manner also soon engrossed her attention. It was so unlike her usual equanimity. She took the Colonel's arm as usual; but Margaret could see that she was occasionally quite silent; then, as if actuated by a sudden whim, talked and laughed, and again as suddenly became silent. Colonel Clive's perception was not very quick, or he might have been as much struck by the change as Margaret; but he felt himself nearly secure of his object, and whilst Agatha was walking with him, he cared little whether she conversed or not. Perhaps on the whole he preferred silence, for conversation was not his forte, and now and then Agatha was too clever for him.

Rouen in the sunshine appeared as striking as Rouen by lamplight, though in a different way. Colonel Clive was methodical, and had arranged beforehand the plan for the day's sights; and Margaret, overcoming both her wish of seeing the Countess, and her anxiety for Agatha, gave herself up to the pleasures before her. The Palais de Justice, and the Hôtel Bourgtheroude, were duly lionised; and afterwards, as the churches are generally closed at twelve o'clock, a second visit to St. Ouen was proposed.

It was perhaps less imposing, less awful, when first viewed by the light of day; there was something lost of mystery and what

even might be termed romance; but the sense of its perfect beauty increased every moment. From whatever point it was viewed, the purity and completeness of the whole building gave a feeling of rest to the mind. Margaret lingered behind her companions, watching the various effects caused by the glancing of the light through the arches, and the graceful pillars, marking the rich outline of the rose windows, and gazing with wonder as upon a fairy scene into the "benitier" at the lower end of the nave, in which columns, and carving, and tracery floated in soft reflection; the work it seemed rather of the spirits of the element in which each delicate line was pictured, than the mirror of the structure of human hands. A few persons were engaged in prayer as on the preceding evening: and Margaret's fear of disturbing them recurred to her again; but they seemed unconscious of the presence of the strangers, who were noiselessly walking through the aisles; and after a little hesitation Margaret, withdrawing from Mrs. St. Aubyn that she might not be obliged to talk, followed the common example. Yet it was a painful one. Even to those who have realised but little of the existence and the blessedness of the visible Church of Christ, it cannot be a matter of indifference to enter a Christian temple, and feel that it cannot be for them a place of public common Christian worship. The question naturally arises, where is the error, the grievous sin, which has thus broken the unity of the Church? As yet the thought had never presented itself to Margaret's mind; but when she wandered through that glorious building, her feelings subdued and exalted, and the longings after truth and holiness, which had slumbered amidst the excitement of the last few days, once more called forth, it forced itself clearly upon her.

She had been told of the errors of the Romish system, but they were not then uppermost in her consideration. Involuntarily the parish church of Deering, its white-washed walls, circular windows, misshapen pews and galleries, and neglected altar rose to view. It was placed by the side of St. Ouen. To Margaret, one was the representative of the Romish, the other of the English Church. She renewed the examination of the beauty before her with something of envy and discontent. The feeling seemed right, and it was indulged; and with it came other thoughts, pure and unearthly. At a little distance knelt a female figure—a lady, simply dressed and apparently young, but her face could not be seen, for her head was buried in her hands. Margaret had noticed her when first they entered; she had watched her since; but there was no movement, no change of position, nothing to

mark the slightest distraction of attention. Even Colonel Clive had walked aside when he passed her, struck by a sudden sense of intrusion. Margaret remembered her own careless prayers, often shortened from weariness, often hurried over as a task, and was conscience-stricken and humbled. Her faith, she had been told, was purer; her Church more simple and primitive; but where was the abstraction from earth, the intense devotedness which were expressed in the attitude of the stranger? If alone at that moment, she could have prayed earnestly, — it would have been a relief, a luxury; but she was with those who had no thought of prayer, and Margaret could not, in an instant and without an effort, collect her ideas, and fix them upon serious subjects. The desire which she then felt was for solitude — solitude at least, in that place: to be one amongst the small number who were not admiring but worshipping. Margaret was standing apart when Agatha came up to hasten her away. She was wishing, she said, to take a sketch in the garden adjoining the church, and if they remained longer, there would be no time.

"A sketch!" repeated Margaret, "why should you do that?"

"Oh, Margaret, how absurd; you wished it yourself, just now."

"Did I?—I think I remember; but I don't care about it. Can't you let me stay here till you have finished?"

Agatha doubted; she did not imagine that Mrs. St. Aubyn would approve. But Mrs. St. Aubyn had no very strict idea of the duties of a chaperone, and in a church there could be no possible objection.

"Margaret was extremely unsociable," she said; "yet if she liked to stay, no one could say nay;"—and Margaret thanked her warmly, and having watched them through the west door, returned again to her reveries. The figure which she had first noticed still retained the same position; and it was different from almost every other. There were some persons kneeling before pictures, some before different altars, and with them Margaret had comparatively little sympathy. They reminded her of what she had been told of the practical, though it might not be the theoretical, idolatry of Romanism; and she could not but feel that visible objects must at all events require a painful effort of the mind in striving to pass beyond them.

But the devotion which had attracted her had nothing of this earthly admixture. It was, to all outward appearance, as pure as it was undisturbed; and why could not she pray also? Why could not she kneel in a Christian church, and ask that God would pardon her many sins, and guide her in her future path?

None could have more need of prayer, for none could be weaker or more ignorant. But a few days had gone by since she had, as she believed, entered upon a new course of life; and a prospect of enjoyment, a change of scene, had entirely deadened her impressions. Only the previous night she had suffered a dream of the fancy to engross her attention, and had lain down to rest, not without prayer, but with such prayer, so cold and wandering, as it was only humiliation to remember; so it might be again. It was a superstitious notion which arose at the moment,—a half belief that the resolutions made in that place would be more lasting than any others. Yielding to the impulse, Margaret cast a hasty glance around to see that she was not observed, and placing her chair in a situation where she was screened by one of the columns of the transept, knelt for the first time amongst strangers in a strange land; amongst Christians, with whom she was forbidden communion. Her prayer was short, offered hurriedly, and with a nervous dread of being noticed; but it was humble and fervent; a supplication for pardon which rose from the very depth of the heart; an act of self-dedication in which there was no shrinking from the prospect of any sacrifice. Margaret rose more tranquil and happy. The sense of loneliness was lessened. A Christian herself, she felt that those around her were Christians also. They had the same wants, the same hopes; differences there might be in externals, but the foundation, she believed, was in all alike.

We live in an age when the unity of the Church of Christ is considered unattainable, and is by many scarcely acknowledged to be a blessing. We have even ceased to lament over its absence; and the greatness of our loss is seldom understood or appreciated till we find ourselves in a foreign country, shut out in spirit from the temples which ought to be open to us as our homes;—upon some it will then press most painfully; the purer, the more earnest, the more sensible of their privileges in their own land, the greater will be their regret and their temptation. Margaret's mind was not as yet one of these: religion with her was only in its germ, but a naturally imaginative and ardent disposition will instinctively cling to the beautiful vision of past ages, when the members of the Christian Church were supposed to form one family on earth, as they hope to be one in heaven; when altars and homes were open to them on every shore; when to the eye of sense, as now to the eye of faith, there was but "one body, and one spirit," and "one hope of their calling;" "one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and

through all, and in all." Whether it were a dream or a reality, few have paused to ask. Whether it were truth in the early ages of Christianity, or when the thirst for temporal dominion had usurped the first place in that kingdom of our Lord which is "not of this world," still fewer will now inquire. It is enough that the longing for visible communion has been excited in their breasts, and that a theory of unity, tangible and comprehensible, is presented to them. Fancy is gratified and feeling roused; and reason — set aside because it has been perverted to earthly uses — is considered no longer as a gift for which we shall be responsible to our Maker, but as a treacherous instrument, which it is unsafe for minds so weak to employ. Till that hour Margaret Percival had never felt that the doctrines and practices of the Romish church could in any way be suited to her needs; and she did not then examine or dwell upon them in detail, but stationing herself where she could best enjoy the beauty of the building, she gave herself up to the holy soothing influences about her, unthinking that aught of danger could be associated with things so pure. They were moments of exquisite enjoyment which were thus spent; moments which might almost have tempted her to believe that the world could never again entangle her in its snares. She was conscious of her sincerity, and earnest in her devotedness; and the prayer which had joined her, at least outwardly, in the fellowship of a sister church, had enlarged and hallowed her feelings of sympathy. There was peace in her heart; and when she again looked for the kneeling figure, it was with humility, yet with less self-reproach. But the object of her interest was no longer to be seen; for during the short time that Margaret's thoughts had been otherwise occupied, she had retired. Margaret was disappointed. She walked once more through the building, expecting the return of her party, but as she saw Colonel Clive re-enter alone, and went towards him, she caught sight of a dress which she recognised, — it was the stranger; yet Margaret would scarcely have imagined her tall graceful form to be the same which she had seen bent in such deep humiliation. She was standing before a picture over one of the side altars, and her face was averted; but when Margaret drew near, she seemed disturbed by the sound of her footstep, and glancing quickly round, their eyes met, and Margaret once more beheld the beautiful features of the Countess Novera. Both paused, but only for an instant. Margaret longed to look again, but the Countess moved aside, and Margaret, passing on, could not perceive the expression of interest mixed with surprise which followed her. The Colonel

hastened her from the church, and the Countess watched her till she was gone; and then, summoning an attendant who was in waiting, stepped into her carriage and drove back to the hotel.

CHAPTER XII.

"ONLY two more days in Rouen," said Margaret to her sister, when she returned to her room the same evening. "Are you very sorry?"

"I don't know. I was not thinking about it."

"But think now. Have you any great wish to go farther?"

"Have you?" was the only answer.

Margaret laughed.—"I know why you won't acknowledge the truth," she said; "you don't choose to own that you are tired of your constant companion."

"Who? what?" and Agatha turned round sharply.

"Nay, there can be no need of explanation; if we could have exchanged partners occasionally, you would not be quite so moody, that is all I mean."

"And I am as wise as I was before," replied Agatha.

"No offence, I hope," said Margaret, archly. "I did not know it was a point which so nearly concerned you."

Agatha cast upon the table the chain and eye-glass which she held in her hand, and threw herself into an arm chair.

"Something is the matter," said Margaret, rather frightened; "are you ill?"

"Me! no, absurd. What makes you think so?"

"You are ill—I am sure: you look so."

Agatha smiled; but there was something unnatural in the expression, and Margaret repeated the observation.

"I am not ill, Margaret, indeed; but I am tired."

"Only tired?—are you sure?"

"Only tired," was the reply; and Margaret pursued her occupations without attempting any further remarks. Agatha leant back her head, and shut her eyes, and her sister thought she was going to sleep: but after a little while Agatha seemed awake again.

"You will be much better in bed," said Margaret; "let me help you."

Agatha rose up quickly:—"Thank you, I am not quite

invalid enough for that: I have a head-ache, — nothing more."

"All Colonel Clive's doing, I am certain," said Margaret: "which does not mean, though, that I am not grateful to him."

"Only that you would not marry him," said Agatha, in a voice of forced calmness.

"Marry him! — no, not for ten thousand worlds."

"And I would," said Agatha, not a muscle of her countenance moving. The tone was quite serious, and Margaret started, and gazed on her sister without speaking.

"And will," continued Agatha, still not showing any change of manner. — "What makes you look so strangely?" she added, as Margaret turned pale.

"Strange! do I look strange? no wonder: but, Agatha, you are so foolish; you frightened me."

"If I did, it was with truth; but there is nothing very alarming in being engaged to be married."

"No! I don't know; I am sure I should think it so. But I should be thankful if you would leave off this habit of teasing."

"Margaret," said Agatha, gravely, "this is no time for mystery: when you think of me from henceforth, it must be as the affianced wife of Colonel Clive."

Agatha fancied she had spoken cheerfully, but she did not know how quickly the ear of affection can interpret a slight intonation of the voice; and Margaret's ear was that of affection. There was little congeniality between Agatha and herself in disposition, little sympathy in taste, but they were sisters, and the strength of that tie it requires years of separation and discordance to loosen.

"In earnest?"—and Margaret stood before Agatha, and laying her hand upon her arm, looked at her steadfastly: "once more tell me, let me have no doubts."

"I cannot say it more clearly," replied Agatha; "Colonel Clive has asked, and I have consented."

There was a dead silence.

"Without consideration, without thinking of my father and my mother, and all at home?" said Margaret, at length.

"There is no occasion," replied Agatha; "you can have no doubt what they will say. But, Margaret, I thought I should have had congratulations."

The word jarred so much upon Margaret's feeling, that her forced composure was at an end. She sat down, trying to hide her face.

"What does this mean, dear Margaret?" said Agatha, with greater tenderness of manner than she usually evinced. "How can there be anything painful in the notion of my marrying Colonel Clive? you must have been prepared for it."

"Prepared! oh, no, no; who could have been? I saw that he admired you, but so does every one." Margaret raised her head, and added in a lower tone, — "Are you sure, Agatha, that you love him?"

The question was a trying one even to Agatha's impenetrability. "I don't know anything about love," she said, after a short pause; "such love at least as people talk of: and if it were to come, it might be no good to me; I might not be able to marry."

"But esteem, — have you esteem, Agatha? — it must be dreadful to marry without it."

"Of course, there is nothing to object to; nothing to find fault with: and you can't imagine how fond he is of me."

"Fond, before marriage!" exclaimed Margaret; but she repented when she saw that Agatha was offended. She rose immediately, and throwing her arm round her sister's waist, and kissing her affectionately, she said,— "I will never talk so again, dearest, if your happiness is concerned; only let me speak to you to-night for the last time."

Agatha did not refuse to listen, and Margaret continued in a hurried voice; "It cannot be love, — you have owned that it is not: and what is married life without it?"

Agatha smiled coldly, and answered,—"I am not romantic."

"Neither am I; you know it well. It is impossible I should ever have cared for any one, and no one has ever cared for me: but I would rather endure the utmost extremity of bodily suffering, than I would risk the happiness of my life by consenting to marry a man for whom I felt, as I am certain you feel, for Colonel Clive."

Agatha turned proudly away from her. "You forget, Margaret," she said, "he is to me now as my husband."

"I am wrong, forgive me," exclaimed Margaret; "and yet I am not wrong; he is not your husband now, and God grant he never may be!"

"He is my husband, in my eyes," said Agatha; "as such he must be spoken of. I have consulted for my own happiness, and my resolution is fixed."

"Fixed! fixed!" repeated Margaret; as if trying to gain the full meaning of the words.

"My father will approve, and my mother will rejoice," continued Agatha.

"And my uncle!" rose to Margaret's lips, but she checked herself in time.

"You will think differently soon," pursued Agatha; "this is only the surprise of hearing what you were not prepared for. For my sake you will love him, when he is your brother."

Margaret's whole soul revolted from the name; but she could not bring herself to utter her secret thought. It was strange that during the conversation not one allusion had been made to the attraction which each knew was, in this case, to be the foundation of married happiness — money. Margaret would scarcely acknowledge to herself that her sister could be heartless and mercenary, and Agatha knew Margaret too well to hold out as consolation the tempting bait from which she was aware both her principle and taste would recoil.

For Margaret's mind was essentially unworldly; more since she had grown into womanhood than even in her childish years. There is a purity and delicacy of feeling instinctive in a woman's mind, bestowed, it might seem, as a special gift to compensate for all that must be deemed inferiority in her position. It was a gift which Margaret had early prized, and most carefully cherished; not by dwelling upon, and exaggerating it into a morbid fastidiousness, but by shunning everything that could taint it. Agatha read books by stealth, which her mother did not approve; Margaret not only refused to follow her example as a child, from a hatred of deception, but when left to the choice of her own studies, closed instantly any volume, however interesting, with which she would have blushed to have been seen. Agatha talked lightly, and listened to tales of scandal, and fostered her natural vanity by drinking in the honied flatteries which were poured into her ear, unmindful from whom they came; but Margaret would hear nothing, would join in nothing which could not have borne the scrutiny of the whole world. The tree of knowledge — such knowledge as was too frequently offered her — would, she felt, be to her the tree of evil only; and blest in her ignorance and innocence, she gave no heed to ridicule, and was contented to hear herself accounted absurdly particular, even by those whose admiration was deemed an honour, if only she might retain her own self-respect. It was the instinct of a pure and simple mind which was her first safeguard; and when religious motives began to actuate her, this was one amongst many causes of continual thankfulness. To know the evil that exists around us, is

sometimes said to be necessary in order to the formation of a sound judgment; but experience will prove the fallacy of the assertion. Familiarity with any object does not sharpen, but deaden our perception of its nature. We live with our friends till we become insensible to the beauty or the deformity of their features; we throw the charm of association around our homes, and forget that they are barren and uninteresting; and we read of vice, and hear of worldliness, and selfishness, and paltry ambition, till we lose all notion of their being in themselves sinful and degrading. We say they are so, but to us they have become common, and our condemnation is unaccompanied by feeling. So it was that Margaret had a better judgment than Agatha, because she had a purer mind. She could see truths to which her sister was blind; and from having learnt to look upon marriage as a most sacred engagement, she had a clear insight into the misery which must be the result when it is entered upon with low views. Yet Margaret saw that it was hopeless to interfere. There were no tangible grounds for objection; it was entirely a question of feeling; and if Agatha had feelings, they were cased in ice, and beyond her reach.

"We will say no more," said Agatha; finding that Margaret's aversion to the idea was greater even than she had expressed.

"If saying were to be of use," replied Margaret,—"if it would only induce you to pause, I would speak till you were weary."

Agatha uttered an exclamation of impatience. "Pause! Margaret,—I have paused; I have been delaying for weeks: yes, a month since I might have brought matters to this point if I had chosen it."

"Then it is deliberate, — wilful," said Margaret, sadly.

"Wilful, if you will call it so; but merely the wilfulness of knowing that I can judge best for my own happiness."

"Happiness! to live with him always," said Margaret; "to feel that you ought to look up to him, and yet that you despise him! to watch his petty mind! to see that he is ridiculed?"

Agatha's brow became crimson.—"This is trying me too far, Margaret," she said; "you said that you would speak for the last time; let it be the last. If we are to be sisters for the future, it must be."

Margaret made no reply; the worldliness, the meanness of her sister's conduct, rose at every instance more fully to view; even indifferent, low-minded people would understand and condemn it: they would say that Agatha had married for money.

Margaret unconsciously gave low-minded people credit for a

portion of her own delicacy. She would have been less unhappy then, though neither better nor wiser, if she had shared Agatha's knowledge of matrimonial speculations. But there was one person whose opinion could not be doubted — her uncle. At the thought of him, Margaret was humbled with shame for her sister: she lay down to rest, but forgetfulness was far from her; and when, at length, she fell asleep, it was with a sensation of greater disgust at the marriage than even at the first moment of its announcement.

CHAPTER XIII.

MARGARET was the last to appear in the salon at breakfast. She did her utmost to seem unconscious, even when Colonel Clive gave a significant pressure of the hand as she wished him good morning; but the party were oppressively gay. The Colonel had assumed a youthful air, and Mrs. St. Aubyn with difficulty refrained from meaning glances. Margaret had purposely delayed dressing, that there might be no time for conversation with Agatha, and now watched her particularly to discover the state of her mind. The placid lovely countenance betrayed no emotion of any kind, except that the colour on the cheek was perhaps a little more heightened than usual; but in manner there was a slight alteration. Agatha talked a good deal, and quickly, especially in answer to any remark of Colonel Clive's. Her adroitness in converting his common-place speeches into something amusing, would have been delightful to an ordinary hearer. Margaret saw in it only the beginning of an effort, — not at self-deception, the time for that was long past, but at deceiving the world. She listened patiently to all that went on, till in answer to some casual remark, Colonel Clive addressed her as "Margaret." Agatha caught the word and the expression of her sister's countenance. She broke into the middle of the sentence with less tact than usual; but the Colonel was not to be diverted from his purpose. "Margaret," he repeated again, and their eyes met, and he smiled. Mrs. St. Aubyn said something about brothers and sisters, and a faint blush tinged Agatha's cheek. Margaret's lady-like feelings struggled hard with her anger. She was aware that under the circumstances the Christian name could scarcely be deemed a liberty; but she was not accustomed to consider the future

relationship; and the term of familiarity, when used even by persons of her own sex without permission expressly granted, was offensive to her taste. She did, however, subdue the rising irritation, smiled also, and replied gently; and none but Agatha saw that the bitter predominated over the sweet.

It was well that the lesson was begun early, for it required constant practice. Agatha's position naturally made a change in the whole tone of the party. "I" and "you" were superseded by "we." Margaret's satisfaction was taken for granted; and Mrs. St. Aubyn, who had rather given up Agatha since her pertinacity about the table-d'hôte, made her the confidante instead, giving her the history of the means by which she had carried out her wishes with regard to the marriage; wishes which had been formed from the time when Colonel Clive succeeded to the Ashington property. "He requires such a wife, my dear," she said; "he is glad of some one to amuse him; he feels wearied sometimes, for he is not like a professional man; and he is such a great admirer of beauty. And Agatha is sure to be happy; she will have everything she wants. As to temper, why,—one would wish it to be otherwise; but she will learn how to manage him."

"I hope so," said Margaret, more gravely than she had intended.

"Oh, no fear, my love; he does extremely well when he is not thwarted; and when there is real affection, things always go straight."

Real affection! how deeply Margaret sighed. In such cases real affection is always taken for granted as a matter of courtesy.

The day was long. Even the sight-seeing, the drive to Mont St. Catharine in the morning, and to the little church of St. Gervais in the afternoon, could not prevent Margaret from finding it so. If anything could have diverted her thoughts, the crypt of St. Gervais, in which the early Christians, fifteen centuries before, offered their solemn worship, would have served the purpose. It did so indeed for a few minutes, whilst the imagination was carried back to past ages, and the change from the first simplicity of a Christian service to the gorgeous ritual of the Romish church was recalled by strength of contrast; but when the church was left, when the narrow steps which led down to the crypt were remounted, and when the old sacristan, whose heart seem devoted to the treasure committed to his care, had bowed and bade them farewell, Margaret's thoughts turned again from heaven to earth. All her wishes were now centred in home. She would not have

gone farther with her present party under any temptation. The Colonel and Mrs. St. Aubyn became more and more uncongenial from the circumstance which was to render them in a degree members of her own family. All defects were seen, and some perhaps magnified. Margaret blamed herself for prejudice and ingratitude; tried to think that Agatha had chosen wisely; endeavoured to believe that married life might be comfortable, even if there was no love to make it actually happy; but it would not do. She was too candid for self-deception, and the utmost charity could not prevent her from fearing that Agatha was acting dishonourably; that she was pretending an affection which she did not feel.

But "time and the hour rub through the roughest day." So Margaret repeated to herself many times, wondering at the comfort which the words gave her; the sort of "assurance doubly sure," which in seasons of weariness or impatience we are occasionally inclined to require. The Sunday morning followed. Margaret's English ideas were shocked at the sight of business and pleasure proceeding as on ordinary occasions, and her incipient liking for the Roman Catholic religion was not increased in consequence. She went to the cathedral with the rest of the party, and hoped she should have understood the service, having read the prayers beforehand, and seen that they were in great part like those of the English Church. She imagined even that it might be possible to join in those which did not embody the peculiar doctrines of Romanism; but all was confusing though very beautiful. The music, the incense, the perpetual movements of the priests, and the brilliant colours of the vestments, distracted her attention. She could not realise that she was in a place where people were uniting in prayer, for all appeared engaged in their own. Some persons near her knelt, some sat, some looked about. The celebration of the mass by the priests, in the choir, was one service, and the devotions of the people, in the nave, seemed another. A connection she knew there must be between them, but she was too ignorant to know what it was; and to be observing, and wondering, and turning over the pages of her book, as if merely watching a show, was distressing to her newly-awakened spirit of piety.

She left the cathedral with the wish never again to be present at a service in which she could not join; and retiring afterwards to her own room, read by herself the prayers of the English Church, which she alone of the party remembered were at that time being offered in their own country. Still more on that day Margaret lamented the absence of unity.

The fourth evening in Rouen was over at last. Colonel Clive's business had been finished on the preceding day, and imperative necessity called him back to England.

"If it had not been business," he said, "which did not admit of delay, nothing would have induced him to allow them to return without seeing Paris; but it need only be a short postponement," he added, looking at Margaret with an intimate, confidential expression. "In a very short time, he hoped, they would both return to the Continent."

Margaret could not bring herself to say either "yes," "no," or "thank you:" but she resolved in her secret heart that nothing should induce her ever to become that most pitiable individual, a companion in a wedding tour.

Silence was now the tacit compact between herself and Agatha, —in packing, at night, in the morning, during the whole of the next day, still it was silence—upon the one subject which interested them. On all others they conversed amicably, and said all that was proper and necessary, but Margaret was not what she had been in spirits and enjoyment. Colonel Clive thought her grave, as he had often done; he could not understand, and did not thoroughly like her, but she was useful in taking care of his sister; and if she had been really disagreeable, he would then have borne with her for Agatha's sake. Mrs. St. Aubyn was rather puzzled; she had made up her mind that every member of the Percival family would be delighted at the marriage—so superior to anything they could have anticipated—good connections, large fortune, gentlemanly manners,—what could be wanting? She began to think, at last, that jealousy must be the origin of Margaret's depression, and watched her narrowly in consequence; and having little else to think of, it became rather an amusement. Margaret was wholly unsuspicious of the observation she was attracting, believing that every sign of her inward sentiments had been suppressed. She exerted herself to make remarks, and looked out for the objects which had pleased her when they had before travelled the same road, but insensibly her mind returned to its first state of listlessness. It was not that she was unhappy, but there was an oppressiveness in everything, —it was impossible to be light-hearted. They reached Havre early in the evening, and found that it would be some time before the packet would be under weigh. A discussion ensued as to what should be done. Agatha was vexed that they had not been better informed, as they might, in that case, have spent a longer time at Rouen. Havre, she thought, was detestable, and it was

her idea that they could not do better than go on board at once. Mrs. St. Aubyn differed from her. The journey had wearied her, she said, and she did not feel well, and thought they should all be the better for rest—such rest as could not be had in a steam packet. Margaret's opinion was not asked; but she hoped that Agatha would have had the grace to yield her own inclination. Agatha, however, was not rendered less selfish by knowing that her will was paramount over all. One of the petty temptations which had induced her to consent to marry Colonel Clive had been the love of power. She imagined she could rule him, and she never ruled at home, at least visibly. She was very courteous —extremely sorry that Mrs. St. Aubyn was fatigued; but, since they were come, she still thought that it would be the best way to go on board at once. They went, for Colonel Clive insisted upon it, notwithstanding Margaret's request and Mrs. St. Aubyn's complaints; and in the course of an hour and a half they were sailing out of the harbour.

The night that followed—what words may describe it? A slight breeze ruffled up into a strong wind; a strong wind became a fierce gale; the gale almost a tempest! "No danger," said the captain; but captains always say so, and inexperienced landsmen find it difficult to believe them. And if it were true, if danger there were not, fright and suffering there certainly were. Noises, unintelligible and fearful; straining of the cordage, creaking of the mast, calls of the sailors, shouts from the look-out, orders from the captain, half stifled screams from ladies, deep groans from gentlemen,—all mingling with and added to the sights, and sounds, and sensations of physical suffering, so great as to prostrate every energy of body and mind. Great injuries are sometimes more easily forgiven than small ones. Mrs. St. Aubyn always declared that Agatha had caused her this night of dire distress; that if she had rested first she should have borne all perfectly well. And when she was carried on shore, pale and helpless, and conveyed to the nearest hotel, her first movement was to motion Agatha from her, and entreat that Margaret would come to her instead. Margaret's commiseration was sincere, for after all Mrs. St. Aubyn's kindness, this seemed a most unfortunate termination to their travels.

Agatha was uncomfortable, but declared that it was no person's fault; the storm could not have been foreseen; and as to Mrs. St. Aubyn's complaints of fatigue and illness before they sailed, she had imagined they were half fanciful. Colonel Clive had told her that his sister often was fanciful. Selfish people are always

ready with plausible excuses; and under the influence of admiration and worldly prosperity, Agatha was becoming every day more intent upon gratifying her own will. A breakfast, which was scarcely touched, and a few hours' rest, succeeded the landing. Margaret was too unwell to make comparisons between English and foreign habits, though they are in general very striking after the return even from so short a visit to the Continent. She took care to order everything for Mrs. St. Aubyn's comfort, and then hurried to her own room, to sleep if possible, and forget—though the sounds still rang in her ears—that such a complication of miseries could have been endured in one night.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE incidents which followed the return of Margaret Percival to her home must for a while be left undetailed, while we turn our attention to persons and events with which as yet she has been but little connected. In a spacious drawing-room, forming one of a suite of apartments in a first-rate London hotel, a little group of three persons was stationed near a large window, commanding one of the most splendid streets in the metropolis. Two were females, the other was a dark-complexioned foreigner, in the dress of a Romish ecclesiastic. His age appeared to be sixty, or even more. Lines of thought had indented his features, and given them an expression not so much of suffering as of deep study—the indication of a mind which has read not only books but men; and when at times he gave his attention to the conversation which was passing, his quick glance, subdued the instant afterwards into rigid indifference, seemed as if it would scrutinise the inmost secrets of the breast. His demeanour was more, however, that of meditation, than of interest in the affairs of the world; for the objects on which his eyes rested excited no remark, and his closely shut lips, together with an involuntary movement of his fingers, showed that his thoughts were preoccupied.

"Lucia," said the Countess Novera, addressing in Italian a slight-made, very intelligent-looking girl, but with an air of melancholy in her countenance, who was sitting near her, "this is not like our beautiful Italy, is it?"

"Ah! Signora," and Lucia shook her head and sighed.

"You repent," continued the Countess, rather sadly; "but you are still at liberty. I am amongst my friends now."

Lucia bent her dark eyes upon the table, and took up some work which was lying beside her.

"Nay," said the Countess, placing her hand gently upon it, "you must amuse yourself whilst you are here."

"Grazia, Signora;" but Lucia did not look up for several moments: and when she did, it was merely to replace her needle in its case, and then, carrying her embroidery with her, she left the room.

"A marvellous change, is it not, father?" said the Countess, addressing her confessor, who had aroused himself from his musing attitude as the door closed. Father Andrea started, for he had not noticed what had passed.

"I should scarcely have thought of bringing Lucia from her home, but for your advice," continued the Countess; "yet I think now you must see that you were mistaken. Her love for me may be great, but her love for her native country is greater."

"These are early days, my daughter," replied the priest; "wait till she is reconciled to the difference of customs."

"And of climate, and feeling, and religion," exclaimed the Countess; her sweet voice becoming peculiarly emphatic.

"We will leave out the last," replied Father Andrea; "Lucia Fontana is not likely to become reconciled to that."

"Neither am I, father," said the Countess, whilst a blush of offended pride mantled on her cheek.

"Still retaining enmity for that one word of friendly caution?" answered the confessor.

"Not enmity, no, that could never be against you; but it was a harsh distrust; tell me that you think it so."

"Daughter, could it be harsh to fear, lest the daughter of an English nobleman, returning to her English home, should, in time, after being exposed to the fascinations of society, think less tenderly of her adopted country?"

"But my religion is not adopted," replied the Countess; "it is the religion of my forefathers, and the country was my husband's."

The last words sank into a whisper.

Father Andrea drew nearer to the Countess, and looking at her steadfastly, said:—"Yes, it was a distrust, not harsh, but uncalled for. Yet, like other human errors, it may be forgiven."

"That is not a word for your lips, father," replied the Countess, in a tone of meekness; "forgiveness is to be sought by me, for my petulance; but I will tell you,—I have sometimes thought that

you would trust more implicitly to Lucia, child though she is, than to me after my many sorrows."

"I would trust her more, simply as I would trust any other erring creature, because she has fewer temptations; but it is, in reality, no question of trust. Heaven forbid that I should ever fear your becoming an apostate from the one true faith. I have only feared lest intercourse with friends you will, perhaps, love too well, should shake your peace of mind; should lead you to regret—"

"My vow! my solemn promise!" exclaimed the Countess, "given to him—my all—in that awful hour! Father, I am indeed humbled!"

"Regret,—only regret," repeated the confessor, in the same undisturbed tone, which showed little sympathy with the Countess's look of anguish.

Beatrice covered her face with her hands;—then suddenly rising,—with recovered self-possession, yet with a deep earnestness of manner, she said: "Hear me, father: I am ignorant, and proud, and self-willed; none can know it better than yourself; and you have distrusted me. Nay,—do not attempt to reason away your words," she added, seeing that he was about to speak; "you were right, for I deserved it: I am a creature of impulse, and, upon some points, I cannot answer for my own convictions for a single day; yet if there is one feeling grafted into my very nature, born with me, cherished, expanded, and now made more sacred by the loss which has rendered life a desert, it is that of devotion to the Church. As I vowed to my husband on his death-bed, so will I now renew that vow to you."

Father Andrea's countenance retained its immovability, till the last words were spoken, when a smile of satisfaction brightened his stern countenance.—"You are right, my daughter," he said; "fear of ourselves is wisdom in the sight of heaven. The binding nature of your promise cannot, indeed, be strengthened, but your own resolution may be. When next I hear your confession I will be a witness to the renewal of your engagement."

"Not then," said the Countess, firmly, "but at this instant;" and, bending meekly before him, she crossed her hands upon her breast, and repeated the words by which once before, when kneeling by her husband's death-bed, she had pledged herself never to give, nor alienate, nor lend, nor mortgage, her lands, her money, her jewels, her property or possession of whatever kind, beyond a certain small specified amount, for the benefit of any individual who should not be in the communion of Rome, or, as she

termed it, "a member of the one Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church."

Father Andrea drank in each word as it was uttered in the clear undoubting tone of one whose heart was free from every taint of insincerity; and then pronounced his blessing fervently, even tenderly.

The Countess rose, placed her hand within his, and said calmly, —"You are satisfied; and now we will speak of Lucia."

"It is useless to-day," he replied; "you are impatient with her. She must be amused: carry her about wherever you may go; divert her mind, if possible. It is but a home-sick fancy, and it cannot be lasting."

"If I were sure of it," said the Countess, musingly; "but the mood comes suddenly, and it was never so before."

"She will be better at Henningsley, my daughter; you must take her there soon."

"Yes, believe me, as soon as it can by any means be made possible. This place oppresses me in mind and body."

"Yet it is very wonderful; I should have thought it might have pleased you, if only from that cause."

"You forget, it has not even the charm of novelty. And the friends you fear,"—the Countess smiled more cheerfully than she had yet done,—"the relations who you believe will have such charms, have already laid their spell upon me, and failed."

"That was years since," replied the father; "when your heart was in Italy. You have owned that the attractions of England are very different now."

"Yes, it seems more my home, because it was the home of my father and my mother, and that blessed one which I called my own is desolate. But the barrier still exists—the difference of religion."

"You will find sympathy even in that respect in England," said Father Andrea.

"Ah! if I could hope so——"

Lucia's re-entrance interrupted the conclusion of the sentence.

The Countess continued after a hasty glance:—"I have but little love now left, father, and I am not likely to bestow that little on English heretics."

Lucia, as she heard this, gave her full attention to the conversation; and the Countess addressing her, said:—

"Father Andrea and I have been talking of our movements, Lucia. You will not be sorry to leave this gay world, and go with us to Henningsley."

Lucia's eyes sparkled. "Ah, Signora! felice, felicissima!—but when?"

"Nay, you must not be impatient," said the Countess, smiling; "we must bestow six weeks, perhaps more, upon London."

"And friends," added Lucia; but in so low a tone that it did not reach the Countess's ear.

"I am going out," she said; "and you will come with me, I am sure. Lady Anstruther's carriage will be here directly. Father, I know your engagements are many."

The Countess left the room, but Lucia remained behind. Father Andrea took up a book, yet his eye wandered frequently from it. Twice he seemed about to make a remark, but each time he stopped, and laying down the volume, allowed his keen eye to rest upon the young girl, who, notwithstanding the Countess's wish, still kept her position.

"My daughter," he said, at length, in a voice of grave condemnation, "you are unjust."

Lucia's eyes flashed at the reproof, but the impulse of anger was in a moment subdued, or at least shown only by the concealed bitterness of tone in which she answered,—"Father, you have told me so before."

"And I repeat it," he continued, still more gravely; "you are unjust, ungrateful; you cherish suspicions where you ought to give your whole trust."

"You did not think so once, father," replied Lucia, gently; though the gentleness was evidently an effort.

"I thought once, and I think still, that England will have greater attractions for the Countess Novera than she is herself disposed to believe; but I never thought, I never said, that those attractions could make her forget her love for you,—the child of her husband's dearest friend."

"She is English," said Lucia, "and I am Italian."

Father Andrea's book was pushed aside with a hasty air as he replied, "These are childish fancies, daughter. I tell you again it is sin to indulge them."

"Then it is sin to love," said Lucia.

"Yes, to love as you would love; to claim all, when you have right only to a part. Think of it, and beware."

He waited for a moment, and finding that Lucia did not answer, added: "We spoke upon this subject at Rouen. I hoped you had profited by my advice."

"The case is altered," replied Lucia; "I saw then that I was fanciful."

"Yet the same jealousy which made you unjust, because the Countess expressed her interest in an English girl, still exists."

"I could understand that, father," said Lucia, "after you explained it to me. It was natural that the Countess should be touched by seeing one whom she supposed a heretic worshipping in a Catholic church; but the friends whom she now has, have no such claims. Even for the sake of our holy religion I have a right to be jealous."

"You will leave the Church to my care, daughter," replied the confessor; "the salvation of your own soul is sufficient for your exertions."

He walked to the door, and once more repeating his warning, left Lucia to her own thoughts. They were not the quiet, happy, hopeful thoughts of an English girl, just entering upon life. The proud spirit of the South was aroused, and as Lucia's fancy wandered back to her native land, she asked herself why she had left it. Why had she not listened to the voice of her own jealous temper, which told her that in England she would be unhappy? The Countess loved her, it was true: she had taken her to live with her since her father's death, and engaged to provide for her when it was found that she was portionless; but the love was not that which Lucia craved. It was pity and fondness, but it was not sympathy. The Countess had been educated with English habits and English care: and Lucia was Italian in every thought and feeling. The Countess was highly gifted and accomplished: Lucia was quick and intelligent, but ill-informed; and, from disposition and habit, unequal to attention. The affection which subsisted between them could not be equal. On one side it was the tenderness, sometimes the compassion, of an elder sister for a variable, neglected, unstable mind: on the other, it was the devotion to a superior being. The Countess saw this, and it grieved her. The affection which we cannot return is a gift we would fain bestow upon another, and Beatrice Novera trusted that the time would soon arrive when the object of her daily care might find a love on which to rest her hopes of happiness. She would fain have left Lucia in Italy, under the guardianship of her father's friend, so the tie between them might have been gently severed. But though the proposal was acceded to at first, it was soon [illegible] Lucia almost insisted upon accompanying the Countess to England, though aware that the feelings which in [illegible] Italy, where she had no rival, might be [illegible] in a foreign land. Since the death of her

husband the Countess Novera had become more English in all her tastes. They were natural to her; and her Italian habits had been grafted upon, but had not superseded, them. She had loved her husband devotedly, for though Italian by birth, and enthusiastically attached to his country, his mind had been formed, and his disposition moulded by a constant intimacy with the Viscount de Lisle. His wife's hopes, and wishes, and pursuits had all been his likewise; and in religion there was the most perfect unanimity. The advancement of the Church of Rome was their great desire; and it was to satisfy her husband's anxiety upon this subject, that the Countess had bound herself by the vow which she had now repeated to Father Andrea. There was no sacrifice required in making it; Beatrice had no affections to tempt her to look favourably upon heretics, and only regretted that the Count Novera should deem it possible for any circumstance to induce her to exercise more than the common Christian charity towards them which religion and relationship demanded. But in satisfying him, she was satisfied herself; and the vow was as yet so little of a restraint, as frequently to be forgotten. Still in re-visiting England, after the lapse of two years from the period of her husband's death, the Countess was aware that she was not without some degree of sympathy for those who were separated from her upon the most important of all points. She felt that it would be a satisfaction to renew the acquaintance with persons whom she had known in her happier days; and the thought of a relation was a relief, for when we are left alone in this bleak world the heart will often cling with tenacity to connections which have little beyond the name to render them inviting. England was now considered more as the scene of her infantine recollections than as the land of heretics; and Henningsley was remembered with a degree of affection that can only attach to our birth-place. It was this change of feeling which had first excited Lucia Fontana's suspicious dread. The Countess might visit England, and she might never return again. She would dwell amongst her new friends, and the ties of a distant land would be forgotten. True. there was one great barrier, and the Countess was bound to the faith of her fathers by early association and long habit; by the memories of her parents and her husband; and by the fervent spirit of piety which was strengthened by her heavy trial;—but Father Andrea had once allowed the existence of a slight uneasiness upon this subject to drop from his lips, and from that time Lucia's resolution was taken not to leave her. The Countess foresaw pain for her companion, and discomfort for herself, in the

"Yet the same jealousy which made you unjust, because the Countess expressed her interest in an English girl, still exists."

"I could understand that, father," said Lucia, "after you explained it to me. It was natural that the Countess should be touched by seeing one whom she supposed a heretic worshipping in a Catholic church; but the friends whom she now has, have no such claims. Even for the sake of our holy religion I have a right to be jealous."

"You will leave the Church to my care, daughter," replied the confessor; "the salvation of your own soul is sufficient for your exertions."

He walked to the door, and once more repeating his warning, left Lucia to her own thoughts. They were not the quiet, happy, hopeful thoughts of an English girl, just entering upon life. The proud spirit of the South was aroused, and as Lucia's fancy wandered back to her native land, she asked herself why she had left it. Why had she not listened to the voice of her own jealous temper, which told her that in England she would be unhappy? The Countess loved her, it was true: she had taken her to live with her since her father's death, and engaged to provide for her when it was found that she was portionless; but the love was not that which Lucia craved. It was pity and fondness, but it was not sympathy. The Countess had been educated with English habits and English care: and Lucia was Italian in every thought and feeling. The Countess was highly gifted and accomplished: Lucia was quick and intelligent, but ill-informed; and, from disposition and habit, unequal to attention. The affection which subsisted between them could not be equal. On one side it was the tenderness, sometimes the compassion, of an elder sister for a variable, neglected, unstable mind: on the other, it was the devotion to a superior being. The Countess saw this, and it grieved her. The affection which we cannot return is a gift we would fain bestow upon another, and Beatrice Novera trusted that the time would soon arrive when the object of her daily care might find a love on which to rest her hopes of happiness. She would fain have left Lucia in Italy, under the guardianship of her father's friend; so the tie between them might have been gently severed. But though the proposal was acceded to at first, it was soon repented of. Lucia almost insisted upon accompanying the Countess to England, though aware that the feelings which in general lay dormant in Italy, where she had no rival, might be awakened to intensity in a foreign land. Since the death of her

husband the Countess Novera had become more English in all her tastes. They were natural to her; and her Italian habits had been grafted upon, but had not superseded, them. She had loved her husband devotedly, for though Italian by birth, and enthusiastically attached to his country, his mind had been formed, and his disposition moulded by a constant intimacy with the Viscount de Lisle. His wife's hopes, and wishes, and pursuits had all been his likewise; and in religion there was the most perfect unanimity. The advancement of the Church of Rome was their great desire; and it was to satisfy her husband's anxiety upon this subject, that the Countess had bound herself by the vow which she had now repeated to Father Andrea. There was no sacrifice required in making it; Beatrice had no affections to tempt her to look favourably upon heretics, and only regretted that the Count Novera should deem it possible for any circumstance to induce her to exercise more than the common Christian charity towards them which religion and relationship demanded. But in satisfying him, she was satisfied herself; and the vow was as yet so little of a restraint, as frequently to be forgotten. Still in re-visiting England, after the lapse of two years from the period of her husband's death, the Countess was aware that she was not without some degree of sympathy for those who were separated from her upon the most important of all points. She felt that it would be a satisfaction to renew the acquaintance with persons whom she had known in her happier days; and the thought of a relation was a relief, for when we are left alone in this bleak world the heart will often cling with tenacity to connections which have little beyond the name to render them inviting. England was now considered more as the scene of her infantine recollections than as the land of heretics; and Henningsley was remembered with a degree of affection that can only attach to our birth-place. It was this change of feeling which had first excited Lucia Fontana's suspicious dread. The Countess might visit England, and she might never return again. She would dwell amongst her new friends, and the ties of a distant land would be forgotten. True. there was one great barrier, and the Countess was bound to the faith of her fathers by early association and long habit; by the memories of her parents and her husband; and by the fervent spirit of piety which was strengthened by her heavy trial;—but Father Andrea had once allowed the existence of a slight uneasiness upon this subject to drop from his lips, and from that time Lucia's resolution was taken not to leave her. The Countess foresaw pain for her companion, and discomfort for herself, in the

"It's quite right, Jenkins; people are not married often in their lives, and so they should make the most of it when they are."

"Miss Percival knows well enough how to make the most of everything, I suspect, ma'am," said Jenkins, sharply, "to my mind Miss Margaret's worth twenty such."

"Well, I don't know, Jenkins: perhaps—but I can't tell—Agatha's a beautiful girl; and to be sure, Margaret is extremely kind. I hope you put by that almond soap she brought me from France."

"Oh yes, it's all safe, ma'am," replied Jenkins, giving a hasty answer to a question which was repeated regularly every day.

"I shall use it some time or other, Jenkins; but it's too good for me; my shrivelled hands are not fit for it. I promised Margaret though, that I would open it on Agatha's wedding-day."

"There's the Colonel just crossing the road now, ma'am," said Jenkins: "certain he doesn't look a bit like a man fit to be married."

"Hush! Jenkins, you shouldn't say so. He's not so young as he was, and not altogether so handsome, but he won't make the worst husband for that. Get my shawl, will you, and my bonnet and gloves."

Jenkins remained at the window till she had lost sight of the Colonel, and Miss Debrett waited patiently till her maid's curiosity was satisfied. She made it a point of duty never to hurry anyone, because she said she knew so well what it was to be hurried herself; and the shawl and bonnet and gloves being brought in due course of time, and very carefully put on, Miss Debrett went out, leaving a last injunction to Jenkins to take care that the soup was ready for old Widow Wallace, and to tell the cook to save all the pieces of bread for the family in Chalk Lane.

The arrival of the Countess Novera had been remarked by many besides Miss Debrett. Some had expected and were looking out for it; others were attracted by the novelty of the carriage; and a few noticed it accidentally. Amongst the last-mentioned was Mr. Sutherland. He was walking with Margaret. It was their first walk together since her return, notwithstanding his engagement; for pressing duties had interfered with his being at the Grove before. Margaret was not sorry to have the opportunity of writing, instead of speaking her sentiments regarding Agatha's marriage. She could not trust herself, and she was beginning to see that hasty words,

even when the motive is justifiable, and no evil consequences are to be apprehended from them, are in themselves wrong. Mr. Sutherland sent her a short answer, but it expressed all that Margaret expected. "Congratulations," he said, "he could not offer. Wishes he could, and did from the very bottom of his heart." Then came regrets at his disappointment at being kept at Alton, and the promise that he would ride over on the earliest day possible.

This day proved to be the one on which the Countess arrived at Henningsley. Margaret had heard nothing concerning it, and had but little leisure for indulging her romance amidst the business realities of her home. Her mother's energy, increased tenfold by delight in Agatha's splendid prospects, and a constant fidgetty anxiety lest everything should not go smoothly, would in itself have been amply sufficient to occupy her time, if not her thoughts; but there was another subject which pressed upon her mind more than any of the circumstances actually connected with her sister's marriage. That event was fixed beyond her power to alter it; but it had opened her eyes to the necessity of imbuing the children with very different principles from those which had been inculcated upon Agatha. The incidents of family life teach much to those who have hearts open to instruction; and Margaret was now alive to many defects which before had passed unnoticed. It signified little that the world pronounced Agatha fortunate, that her mother exulted in private, or that her father, after the first surprise of the announcement, gave his free consent: Margaret's sense of honour and delicacy was shocked, for to her Agatha's utter absence of affection was glaring. From her inmost heart she resolved that she would spare neither time nor labour in bringing up the children with higher principles. She would watch them, check them, be constantly with them. Her first mania for education returned with nearly its original force. Plans and theories, and a certain improvement in matters of practice followed; and then disappointment. But Margaret was not again to be baffled by difficulties. There was a root of strength within her, or rather, the strength which had been bestowed in infancy was once more reviving, and promising to bring forth fruit, thirty, sixty, it might be a hundred-fold. She was alone, indeed, in her endeavours, as far as human aid could assist her, except when she could apply to her uncle; but even in the course of a few weeks, notwithstanding the distractions of care, and pleasure, and business, Margaret had learnt and felt something of that enduring peace which is the inner life

of a Christian. She could pray, and pray in earnest, and conscience bore witness to her sincerity, even when it most accused her of sins and neglect. Yet at times the vagueness and unsatisfactoriness of her former views seemed to return. It was peculiarly so when she thought of her younger sisters. If they were to grow up without rule or object, as she had done; if they were to live lives of self-indulgence, frittering their talents, occupying themselves in discovering how time was to be spent, not used, what could shield them from narrow worldly ideas? It seemed a miracle that she herself should ever have attained to the prospect of anything beyond. With her brothers there might be more hope. They would be thrown into the world and forced to struggle with difficulties. The duties of their professions and the interests of their country would be to them a centre for ambition. There would be something external to themselves to act both as a stimulus and a check, and in belonging to a body, they would feel that their existence was of consequence, and lose the petty sense of individuality which seems the bane of a woman's life, especially when unmarried. Margaret felt that something was wanting, both for her own satisfaction, and the welfare of her sisters, but she knew not where to seek it. Mr. Sutherland's conversation recurred to her; but though she had acted upon his expressed wishes, and in so doing had gained a comfort she could not have anticipated, there was still much that he had said which from not having been clearly understood, was but faintly remembered. Her impression was that he had used rather exaggerated language, not as to the importance of Christianity, but as to its power of gratifying that longing for some tangible object of interest which had driven her to take refuge from a world of sense in one of shadows. Religion, she thought, might occupy the place of universal philanthropy; but it could never be like the spirit of patriotism. Its extent was too vast, and its elements were too incongruous. She was a Christian, but so were Independents, Baptists, Quakers, primitive Methodists, Wesleyans, Swedenborgians,—yet what communion could there be between them? Margaret sighed and blamed herself for discontent and want of faith. Ought she to require more than had been given her? Would it not be better to concern herself with the simple duties before her, and not wish for anything greater? Home was a woman's sphere, the world was a man's. If she could govern her own heart, and teach the children to govern theirs; or, more truly, if she could trust the work in His hands who alone can order the "unruly wills and affections" of sinful beings, she ought to be satisfied.

Margaret said to herself, what many of her age and sex have said before her; what hundreds, thousands, have acted upon, and in sincerity and humility have fulfilled the duties of their station, and gone to their graves in peace, followed by the tears of their friends, and the blessings of the fatherless and the widow. But there are others, the gifted, the enthusiastic, the poetical, conscious of high intellectual powers, and believing themselves, perhaps justly, equal to men in all but physical strength, and sobriety of judgment, whose whole life is a struggle between the inferiority of their natural position and the cravings of an ardent, highly-cultivated mind. Too simple and retiring to desire for an instant to occupy a prominent position, they yet feel themselves capable of something higher than they dare to undertake. The wish, "if I were but a man," passes the lips, and raises a smile, and is forgotten; but it is no transitory feeling which prompts it. Its utterance may be checked by reserve, and a dread of being misunderstood; but in solitude it rises again and again; first, as a desire to do good to others, then, as a temporary discontent, then, it may be, as repining, and at length, as a settled, fretting, cankering evil, which perhaps terminates in the neglect of small duties, because great ones are not within reach. It was this wish which was now arising in Margaret's breast. She longed to be working for some object besides her own improvement; but she had no idea that religion could furnish it Sometimes she fancied herself a clergyman, devoting himself to the improvement of his parish: sometimes a statesman, dedicating himself to his country's service: sometimes a general, winning kingdoms by the success of his armies; or even a soldier in that army, fighting under laws and strict discipline. In each case there was the exertion for some definite purpose, independent of self. Her purpose, she said to herself in her most thoughtful moments, ought to be to extend the kingdom of Christ upon earth: it would be so, she hoped, in time; but her faith was too weak to seize upon such an object, as it would upon something visible and earthly.

But, happily for Margaret, the day of dreams was over, at least they were never long encouraged. Practical duties surrounded her, and she engaged in them at once, energetically though ignorantly, and with no very definite aim. She formed rules for herself and the children, which were enforced strictly one day, and the next altered, because proved to be mistaken. She fixed upon a certain plan for her religious duties, especially for reading the Bible; and then changed because she imagined another would suit her better. She determined to exert herself for the poor, but

not knowing how to begin, she gave away money upon unworthy objects, because she had no one to direct her efforts aright. All these mistakes Margaret made, and many more; whilst at the same time she was distressed at Agatha's marriage, worried with the children's faults, teased perpetually by her mother, not at all comfortable at the tone of Craven's letters, and pained at the conviction that personal religion alone could not satisfy all her needs, or make her thoroughly contented with her position in life. An inferior mind and a less sincere disposition might, under such difficulties, have returned to its former state; but Margaret was not to be easily frightened from the path of duty. With a vigorous effort she threw aside all her internal anxieties, until she could talk them over with her uncle, and walked boldly forward by the light which had already been vouchsafed. Whatever task presented itself, she looked at it fully, and resolved how it was to be performed. Even when most bewildered by conflicting claims, by the attention required to her mother and the children, the necessity of studying herself, the calls upon her time from her numerous acquaintances, she still did something; generally that which was most disagreeable: whilst the remembrance of her past neglects, and the sense of gratitude for unmerited mercies, became day by day stronger, and urged her onwards when she might otherwise have been tempted to sit down in despair. Mr. Sutherland's visit was now the one thing to which Margaret looked for comfort. Once or twice she thought of writing to him upon the subject of her dissatisfactions; but he was daily expected at the Grove, and it was difficult to express such vague feelings by words; they required looks and tones to render them intelligible; and then her uncle could understand half-sentences, he could anticipate her thoughts; and thus often save her the pain of mentioning them; and, in the hope of seeing him, Margaret determined it would be best, upon the whole, to bear her burden patiently, and wait till his arrival before she sought relief; though she did now and then grow a little impatient, and wish that Alton was a few miles nearer, so that they might go and return the same day; or that the curate lived in another house, so that she might stay with her uncle, as he had often expressed a wish that she should do. Mr. Sutherland came, and Margaret, to his surprise, was shy. She had never hitherto been reserved with him; but her views were at last real, not theoretical, and she could scarcely bring herself to speak of them. And what could she say of Agatha, or rather, what would her uncle say? Agatha herself was a little uncomfortable upon the

occasion, and contrived to be engaged from home as soon as she heard her uncle was expected, in order that they might not meet till dinner-time. But she need not have been afraid. Mr. Sutherland neither said nor looked anything different from usual. He avoided a private interview with his sister, and in reply to her anticipations of happiness, merely hoped that Agatha had chosen wisely.

"Wisely! my dear Henry, how very strangely you talk!" exclaimed Mrs. Percival. "What can be more wise?—a good husband and a capital house, and a large fortune to keep it up. You are really absurd."

Mr. Sutherland smiled that sort of smile which is very nearly a sigh; and speaking to Grace, who happened to enter the room at the moment, asked her to run upstairs and see if Margaret were ready to go out with him. Mrs. Percival could not interpret his countenance; but she saw he was not disposed for conversation, and left him in a pitying mood, saying to herself, "Poor fellow! it is no wonder; after that sad loss he never can hear of marriages with any pleasure."

CHAPTER XVI.

"We must go into the town first," said Margaret, as she took her uncle's arm. "I have a little shopping to do: not very much though, so you need not take fright."

"I don't think I should stay at home, even if I did," replied Mr. Sutherland. "It is more than two months since you and I walked together."

"Two months in time, and twelve in feeling," said Margaret.

"Yes, fully that, I am sure. I was very glad you wrote to me about Agatha; not that I could have had any serious doubts of what your opinion would be."

"I imagine that my opinion is a general one in this instance," said Margaret. "Amongst all the congratulations, there has not been one hearty one except Miss Debrett's."

"And hers was from genuine kindness," said Mr. Sutherland. "It is not in her creed that any one bearing the name of Percival should do a wrong or imprudent action."

"If she live long enough she will be disabused of that error," observed Margaret. "I am not very old, and not very much

given to prophesy; but I sometimes think I see the faint cloud in the distance, which is to gather and burst over our heads."

"Let us leave it in the distance," replied Mr. Sutherland, gravely; "unless we have the power to disperse it. Our life is the present."

"And a very unsatisfactory one it is," said Margaret. "Not from the old causes exactly," she added, seeing disappointment in her uncle's face, "I am not going to tease you with my former discontents."

"You never tease me by anything; but I hoped you would have tried to work out for yourself the principles we talked about the day I met you at Deering."

"I did," said Margaret. "You never expressed a wish yet which I did not regard as a command; and I have learnt much, I hope, at least as to my own position; but there have been such distractions since."

"Yes, that French journey; I want to hear it in detail when you can give it."

"I fancied I should have spoken of nothing else," replied Margaret; "and now it seems gone;—past, as if it were an event of ten years ago."

"And the Countess Novera, too?" inquired Mr. Sutherland.

Margaret laughed. "I did not think you would even have remembered her name. No; she is not past, but future. She is to be here very soon."

"I remember her mother," said Mr. Sutherland; "just before they left Henningsley I was staying in the neighbourhood, and she paid a farewell visit to my friends. I was a mere boy at the time, yet I shall never forget her. It was a more perfect figure, and countenance and manner, than I can ever expect to see again."

"Wait till the Countess arrives," said Margaret.

"You say she is like the picture at Henningsley; if so, she does not resemble her mother. There is pride in that picture."

Margaret was slightly vexed, though she would not have hesitated to make the same observation herself."

"Perhaps there may be something of that expression in the Countess's face," she replied; "it is in the mouth; but her smile is peculiarly soft and sweet."

As she said this, Margaret stopped at the door of a shop, not unwilling to discontinue the conversation. A tone of criticism was the last in which she desired the Countess or any person

connected with her to be mentioned; but she had written lightly about their meeting at Rouen, fancying that, as a man, Mr. Sutherland would be inclined to ridicule her sudden girlish prepossession; and he had no idea that anything he said could be disagreeable to her.

Margaret's purchases were soon completed, and they walked farther down the street. The dull town was unusually lively; shop-boys had left the counters, and were standing at the doors, watching apparently for something which was to arrive from the London road; about half a dozen people were gathered together at the corners; and occasionally a head was seen peeping over a blind. Mr. Sutherland pointed out to Margaret these indications of curiosity, which, he observed, always amused him, as specimens of country-town life; but Margaret made no remark in return, for she had fallen into a musing mood, and was a little chilled by what her uncle had said. There could be no perfect sympathy, unless he could understand the sources of her interest, and she was afraid he could not. Perhaps no man could, but this was a disappointing thought.

The shopping was finished, and they were leaving the town, when a carriage drove rapidly up the street, and the symptoms of curiosity increased. Heads were bent forward, and old men rested on their sticks, and young children put down their baskets, to stop and look about them. Mr. Sutherland and Margaret stopped also, to inquire who was expected; but the man to whom they referred for information was as ignorant as themselves.

"'Tis the lady from over the seas, sir," said a boy who overheard Mr. Sutherland's question; "they've been watching for her all the afternoon."

"And what makes them all so wish to see her?" inquired Margaret, with eagerness.

"Because they say she's a power of money, and means to give away soup every week," replied the boy.

Mr. Sutherland walked on slowly; but Margaret was certain that his interest was as much awakened as she could have expected. A few moments brought the carriage near. Something was amiss with the harness, and there was a little delay whilst one of the postillions put it right. A mob of boys was collecting, but Mr. Sutherland kept them off, and in doing this approached so close that he had a full view of the Countess's features. She was looking pale and rather melancholy, but her glance was quick and animated. She was trying to recall the faint images of her childish days; and occasionally she spoke to Lucia and Father Andrea in

a tone of satisfaction. Margaret was standing apart; and believing herself hidden, was gazing more intently than she was aware of. As the postillion remounted she advanced to take her uncle's arm. The Countess leant forward, saw her, and turned directly to Father Andrea; but the signs of recognition were lost upon Margaret; she moved aside; the Countess sank back in the carriage, the word was given, and the postillions drove off; and Margaret again found herself walking leisurely up the High Street of Staunton, with feelings of excitement and expectation which a few minutes before had seemed dead within her.

"Yes, she is beautiful!" was Mr. Sutherland's first exclamation; "words could scarcely exaggerate."

"Beautiful and unhappy," replied Margaret; "there is more of sorrow than of pride in her face."

"Something of each: she does not resemble her mother."

"She must be friendless here," said Margaret.

"I don't know; she has many relations, and she is not alone."

"That must have been her confessor," continued Margaret. "I forgot she was a Romanist."

"So did I too till I saw him. I wish she was an English churchwoman as well as an English lady; she might then do infinite good by living here."

"She is never English at all, to my mind," said Margaret: "her voice, and manner, and the very expression of her countenance, are foreign."

"Yes; and one cannot help regretting it. These are not days in which the nobility of England can be spared from the Church."

"But you would not exclude the Countess Novera from being useful, because she cannot agree with you upon particular points of doctrine?"

"She may be useful in giving away money," replied Mr. Sutherland; "but that is not what we require now. England and English people cannot be benefited by efforts exterior to the Church."

"You will be shocked at me, I know," said Margaret; "but there is scarcely anything more vague to me than the idea of working for the Church."

"No," replied Mr. Sutherland, "I am not shocked: your feeling is that of many, and it has been the growth of years of neglect and false principles. But, Margaret, have you never felt the want of such an object—something visible to which to attach yourself?"

"Yes, indeed." Margaret spoke earnestly, for the question brought to her remembrance the floating dissatisfactions which

she had lately been striving to banish. "But I fancied the wish was a wrong one," she added; "that it arose from my own weakness; and that I ought to be contented with trying to do good to myself and to the persons immediately about me, — the children, for instance, and the poor."

"So far you were right, that we are all limited to a certain sphere of action, and must be contented with it; but do you not see the immense difference between working in that sphere, with the idea that it is part of a great whole, and working in it as an isolated individual?"

"We cannot really be isolated," said Margaret, "because all Christians form but one body — the Epistle to the Ephesians says so."

"It says," replied Mr. Sutherland, "that we are to endeavour to keep 'the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace; because there is one body, and one Spirit, and one hope of our calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism.' Now look at Unitarians, denying the divinity of our Lord, and calling themselves Christians; look at Baptists, enforcing adult baptism alone; look at Wesleyans, and Independents, and the countless sects of the present day, making both the sacraments mere signs, and all differing from each other and from the Church in their forms of government, where can the 'one body' be found amongst them?"

"Spiritually they may be one," said Margaret.

"Was it merely spiritually in the primitive ages, when the apostles appointed elders and rulers in every church; when it was said that if one member suffered, all the members suffered with it; or, in later days, when strangers travelling to a foreign land, carried commendatory letters to the bishop, and were received at once as parts of the great Christian family? The unity of those days was a visible unity — the body was a visible body."

"But," said Margaret, "it seems vain to go back so far; after the innumerable changes which have passed over the world, have we any right to expect that the forms of religion should continue unaltered?"

"Except that the Church of Christ is of divine origin, and therefore, like her Lord, unchangeable."

"Then, where are we to look, what are we to do?" exclaimed Margaret, quickly. "Facts are against you."

"Nay, I beg your pardon; facts are for me. The bishops of the English branch of the Catholic Church are regularly descended from the apostles; the faith of the English Church is the faith of the apostles; the prayers of the English Church are the

prayers, if not of the apostles, yet of their immediate successors; and, therefore, to work for the English Church, is to work for one of the parts of that body, of which our Lord himself is the head."

"And all others are to be excluded?" began Margaret, gravely.

Mr. Sutherland interrupted her: "Yours is the common mistake, my dear Margaret. You fancy that because a man strongly asserts his own privileges, he must necessarily deny them to others. We have nothing to do with others; to their own Master they must stand or fall. God forbid that I, or any human being, should presume to confine the mercies of Christ within the strict limits of the visible Church. All that I wish to make you perceive is, that we have certainty on our side — certainty that we are descended from the apostles, and have received the true faith; and therefore that it ought to be our wish that all others should be brought to a like certainty."

"But the unity of the Church must mean something more than the Church of one particular nation," said Margaret.

"Of course it does; it includes all Churches which are really Churches, descended from the apostles and adhering to the true faith."

"And union between Romanists and ourselves?" inquired Margaret, doubtfully.

"You are inclined to be argumentative, I see, my dear child," said Mr. Sutherland; "and if so, perhaps this conversation may do you more harm than good."

"No, indeed," replied Margaret, gently; "if I could realise all I think you mean, it might add very much to my happiness. But my thoughts turned then to the Countess Novera."

"And to my regret, I suppose, that she does not belong to the English Church," said Mr. Sutherland; "but I am not going to enter upon the subject of the relative position of the two Churches. It is a very deep and intricate one, requiring accurate historical knowledge, and not necessary for the regulation of your daily conduct. All that is required for you is the knowledge that you belong to a true branch of the Catholic Church, and ought to devote your utmost energies to its service."

Margaret was a very little annoyed. She did not like her question being put aside, and there was a slight tone of pique in the remark which followed: "It would be difficult to devote anything to the Church at Deering."

Mr. Sutherland understood her thoughts, and answered them. "You must forgive me, my love," he said. "The last thing I

should wish to do would be to refuse to enter upon any question which interests you; but this one involves controversy, and is likely to be dangerous, if only as withdrawing your attention from practical duties."

Mr. Sutherland's forbearance never failed to be a reproof to Margaret's hastiness; and she was vexed with herself as she replied, "I know you are right, and I am proud. Some faults I shall never cure; that is one."

"Not so, Margaret; all faults are curable. If they cannot on earth be entirely uprooted, they may always be kept under by a strong hand. To doubt this is to be wanting in faith."

"And I am wanting in faith," said Margaret, "I am aware of it constantly. Lately nothing satisfies me, because I cannot be contented with spiritual instead of visible objects. I have prayed, and thought, and formed rules, and acted—yes, indeed, I have acted upon them;—but all seems petty. A woman's life must be so,"—and she sighed deeply.

Mr. Sutherland considered a little, and then said, "But if you are acting under a system, bound down by rules, having your appointed work to do; a work as efficacious for the prosperity of a great body as is the government of its rulers—what will become of the pettiness then?"

"Mysteries," replied Margaret; "you often deal in them; and you speak of men."

"No, believe me; I speak of women, English women, the members of the English Church."

Margaret looked up in surprise.

"You would agree with me, I am sure," continued Mr. Sutherland, "if you could once realise what the Church truly is; not a sect, not a number of persons voluntarily uniting under a self-constituted government; but a body governed by the laws of our Lord and his apostles; its ministers appointed to be the channels through which the sacraments of grace are administered; and its members, even the humblest, forming the stones of that glorious building which must last for ever. No earthly polity can claim half the love and loyalty which is due to the Church."

"But where is this polity?" asked Margaret. "I can understand loyalty to a sovereign, and love to a country: they come before me, not actually, but through representatives; but loyalty to the Church seems to me to consist in little except going to hear Mr. Stanley instead of John Dyer, the Plymouth Brother."

Mr. Sutherland sighed, and his countenance assumed a graver expression than before.

"Forget Deering," he said, "if you can. The Church is not formed of one individual clergyman. Something of the polity you can see in the bishops and the different orders in the Church, which stand in the same relationship to the body as the rulers of a state do to the nation at large. The laws ought to come home to your daily practice; they ought to regulate your conduct."

"They do," said Margaret; "they make me go to church every Sunday."

"Weekly conduct, that is," replied Mr. Sutherland; "I mean literally every day."

A pause followed. Margaret was conscious she had spoken lightly, and presently said in a tone of humility—"You must not be angry with me; and if you will tell me all you mean, I will try and do what you recommend. I did try the last time after we had talked together."

"I scarcely know what to recommend now," he said. "My real wish is to put the idea into your head,—to make you understand that the Church is a visible body, and that you are a part of it, and ought to seek its advancement and be governed by its rules. But I will ask you one question: suppose you could once comprehend this to be the case, do you not think it would add dignity to your life? that it would give you an object independent of your individual improvement, or even of the improvement of the persons immediately about you?"

"Yes, it might; it would, I think," replied Margaret, hesitatingly.

"But it is so difficult to grasp the idea," said Mr. Sutherland, with a smile; and then relapsing into his former manner, he added,—"Yes, it is indeed difficult. Our own sins, and the sins of our forefathers, lie with a fearful weight upon us. But, Margaret, there is one thing always within our reach: prayer that our eyes may be opened, and that we may be able to understand the excellency of our Church, and may live more worthily of our calling as her members."

Margaret was touched by the earnestness of her uncle's voice. She had not seen before how near the subject was to his heart. But the walk was ended, and they stood at the Grove gate, and Margaret was just going to enter when a quick exclamation was heard of—

"Margaret, my dear, how fortunate!" and they were joined by a third person.

"And Mr. Sutherland, too!" began Miss Debrett, when she approached near enough to hold out her hand, and give a hearty

shake; "really, I am so very glad. I have not seen you I can't tell the time when."

"My uncle has not been here for two months," said Margaret.

"No, I dare say not; you are too good, Mr. Sutherland, too busy. I know you will wear yourself out."

"Miss Debrett does not mean what she says, I am sure," said Mr. Sutherland; "too good we need none of us fear to be; and too busy it is scarcely possible to be in a parish like mine, though it is not a very large one."

"Ah! but the services, my dear Mr. Sutherland. You are not aware what you are doing. Twice every day, I am told; and schools, and catechising, and all the poor people. I wonder you are alive to talk of it."

Margaret looked at her uncle rather anxiously.

"I think you are growing thin," she said.

"Yes, to be sure he is, my dear," observed Miss Debrett. "He starves himself. I hear every one is doing it. Why don't you go, and stay with him, Margaret, and take care of him?"

Margaret was amused, and said she was afraid that the curate, who lived in the house, would rather stand in the way; and sixteen miles was too great a distance to go and return, so that she had but little opportunity of knowing anything about him.

"Well, he must give himself a holiday," said Miss Debrett. "He will be obliged to do it soon. I venture to say now that I know more about some things than you do."

"Very probably," observed Margaret, who directly guessed the allusion.

"Very certainly," said Mr. Sutherland, playfully, "ladies' dresses, for instance."

"You are laughing at me, I know. You gentlemen always do, but I can keep my own secret. Thursday fortnight—we won't say what day that will be."

"A happy one, I hope," said Mr. Sutherland, seriously, "if it is to be Agatha's wedding-day."

"How could you guess?—but it is true; you lost the first hearing by being away."

"Ill news fly quickly," said Margaret, in a low voice, to her uncle.

"You are very odd people," continued Miss Debrett, looking at them both; "you don't seem at all pleased. But Margaret, my dear, you needn't be afraid; your turn will come by and by; and as for Mr. Sutherland, I expect to hear of his marriage every day."

Margaret felt her uncle's arm hastily withdrawn. He dropped his stick, and stooped to pick it up. Miss Debrett, with all her kind-heartedness, had no perception of the years which may pass by and still leave a wound unhealed; and would have gone on in the same bantering strain, if Margaret, who was sensitively alive to anything which wounded her uncle, had not dexterously diverted the current of her ideas, by inquiring whether Colonel Clive was in the house.

"No, my dear, he's gone; just this moment left: but I heard all that passed. They did not mind an old woman like me, and Agatha would not go and talk to him alone; she was shy, and she looked uncomfortable, quite white, indeed. It was all the Colonel could do to make her settle exactly, and, I think, if it had not been for your mother, she would not have had the courage at last."

"Courage!" repeated Margaret, emphatically: "yes, courage it must have required, indeed."

"Well, I don't know, my dear; I think, when a woman has once made up her mind, the sooner everything is brought to an end the better. There's many a slip—you know the old proverb, Mr. Sutherland."

Mr. Sutherland did know it well, and blamed himself for his weakness, in allowing the associations connected with it to give him so much pain. Margaret noticed a certain quivering of the lips, which was almost the only sign he ever gave of internal agitation, and walked on, hoping that Miss Debrett might take leave. The hint was received, but Miss Debrett, after parting, returned to assure them that the Countess was arrived, and to give them an accurate description of her.

"Great events always come double, my dear mother used to tell me. Not that this one is anything like Agatha's marriage; don't think I meant to compare them; but still it's something. Directly I saw the carriage go by, I said to myself, that it would not be the only thing which would happen to-day, and so you see it proved. But, good bye, I won't keep you any longer. You must be longing to go to dear Agatha."

"Dreading—she should have said," observed Margaret, as they stood before the door.

Mr. Sutherland kept her from entering the house.

"I must depend upon you for one thing," he said. "If possible, do not let me be asked to solemnise the marriage. You will understand the reason. If our fears for Agatha's happiness should be realised—"

"Yes, yes," said Margaret, quickly, "trust me, you shall not be called upon."

"And, Margaret, one thing more."

Mr. Sutherland hesitated, and a tinge of colour spread itself over his face, and was succeeded by unusual paleness.

"I should be sorry—I could not quite bear your mother to think I have any other cause for declining. She distresses me, sometimes, by allusions."

He stopped, and Margaret did not look at him, but in a gentle voice she said,—

"Colonel Clive's cousin, the Dean, is the proper person."

Mr. Sutherland pressed her hand affectionately, and Margaret hastened to the drawing-room, though with unwilling steps, to hear the particulars of what had passed, and to exert her ready tact in preventing her uncle from being obliged to say or do anything which might give him pain.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE autumnal morning sun was shining into the drawing-room at Henningsley. Long years had gone by since it had shed its brightness in that spot upon anything but the remains of former splendour; and even now, there was less of the refinement of modern times, than of the cumbrous magnificence of by-gone generations, in the appearance of the apartment. Tapestried chairs, with faded gilt backs, still were used instead of luxurious couches; the walls were wainscoted in white, and gilded; the glasses were inserted in the panels, and the lines which joined the different portions, showed that they belonged to an age when enormous pier-glasses were unknown. Thick damask curtains, festooned over the windows, hung in heavy folds to the ground, upon which was spread a carpet of splendid design, but so dimmed in colour, that in parts the outline could hardly be traced: and though a few choice modern ornaments were placed upon the high carved chimney-piece, and the inlaid cabinets, they were little in unison with the furniture. Henningsley was a relic of past ages, hastily refitted to suit the need of the fastidious, but, perhaps, less pure taste of more civilised times, and the contrast it afforded to the costly decorations of London was striking to the eye of the Countess Novera, and painful to that of her com-

panion. Lucia's countenance was scarcely more cheerful now that she had attained her wishes, and saw that the Countess had escaped unaltered from the attractions of the metropolis, than it had been upon her first landing in England.

"You will find it lonely here, Signora," she said, as, on the morning after her arrival, she came into the room in which the Countess was standing, gazing upon the garden with an abstracted air.

"All things are lonely now, Lucia," was the reply, in a tone of sadness. "England or Italy, it must all be the same."

"But you will have no society as in London," continued Lucia, wishing to discover whether the Countess was satisfied.

"No, but I do not care for it yet. Lady Anstruther will come to me when I wish it, but I prefer quiet for the present."

"Certainly, it is not as if your whole life was to be spent here," pursued Lucia.

Beatrice did not answer the observation, and Lucia began her work. A long silence followed, first broken by the Countess.

"It was a curious meeting, yesterday," she exclaimed. "You did not remark her as I did. Hers is not a common face."

"English, decidedly," said Lucia, in concealed irritation.

"You could scarcely have seen her on your side of the carriage," continued the Countess. "She must be of foreign extraction, I imagine, which would account for her religion."

"There will soon be no difficulty in satisfying yourself, Signora," replied Lucia. "If you intend to receive visitors, you will easily gain the information which you so much desire."

Beatrice knew what this speech implied, but it did not render her cautious. "I shall inquire about her," she said, carelessly. "It will be a comfort to us to feel that we are not alone amongst heretics."

"The comfort, no doubt, will be necessary for you, Signora," replied Lucia; "it is not so for me, I am contented."

The Countess looked at her with an expression of mingled sympathy and amusement, and exclaimed, "Really, Lucia, I must beg Father Andrea to interfere if this mood continues. I thought it was to have been left in London. But you must not be so childish. Come, I will read to you, and then you shall have an English lesson."

She took up a volume of Tasso, and turning to the opening canto, began to read, in a voice the liquid tones of which seemed especially formed for the melody of the language. Lucia's sullen air appeared at first impenetrable; but as Beatrice proceeded,

her imagination grew excited, and, after a time, laying down her work, she sat with her eyes riveted upon the Countess's beautiful face, on which there now rested an expression of enthusiasm, which was too often hidden by the shadow of an ever present grief. It was the expression in which Lucia delighted, for it recalled the days of their early acquaintance, when Beatrice, in the fulness of her happiness, would sometimes give utterance to secret visionary wishes, and tell of the dreams which were fostered by her husband's approbation, and of which the advancement of the Church was the one great object. Those seasons of unreserve had originally formed the connecting bond between two minds, otherwise totally dissimilar. Lucia had been educated strictly in attachment to the Romish Church, and the rhapsodies which Beatrice so eloquently poured forth had found a ready echo in her own heart. But years and sorrow gave a different tone to the Countess's character. She became less excitable and more real: her religion was the religion of the heart, whilst Lucia's remained that of the imagination. There was little now to recall the union of past days, except when, on occasions like the present, the Countess forgot the self-command, which, on principle, she strove to exercise, and suffered herself to be visibly wrought upon by poetry, or an unusual interest in conversation.

"Listen, Lucia," she exclaimed, her eye kindling with delight, as she repeated, a second time, the concluding verse of the splendid speech in which Godfrey de Bouillon addresses the Egyptian ambassadors:—

"Ma quando di sua aita ella ne privi,
Per gli error nostri o per giudizi occulti
Chi fia di noi ch' esser sepulto schivi,
Ov 'i membri di Dio fur già sepulti?
Noi morirem, nè invidia avremo ai vivi;
Noi morirem ma non morremo inulti:
Nè l'Asia riderà di nostra sorte,
Nè pianta fia da noi la nostra morte."

"Ah! Lucia, those were days when life was, indeed, valuable. Heresies and schisms were unknown then; the battle of the Church was with heathen nations, and not as now, too often, with those who ought to have been nurtured within her own fold."

"And who will never be recovered to it," said Lucia. "Father Andrea thinks there is little hope."

"He thinks cautiously," replied Beatrice. "If he has hope, he will not own it; and he fears the cold rationalising spirit of

my countrymen. He says that the frozen currents of the North flow in their veins."

"Father Andrea reasons from what he hears, not from what he sees," said Lucia, raising her deep, dark eyes to the Countess with a look of fond admiration.

"The hearing is more true than the seeing, Lucia," replied the Countess. "No one can judge by me. English though I am by birth, and English in a measure by principle,—I am not, and never can be, English in affection, to forget the land of my adoption — the centre of Christendom."

Lucia rose suddenly from her seat, and advancing to the Countess, knelt humbly by her side, and resting a hand upon her lap, said,—"Those were blessed words, Signora; would that Father Andrea had heard them!"

The Countess drew back as if offended, but immediately recovering herself, she stooped to kiss Lucia's forehead, and answered, playfully,—"Father Andrea is wiser than you, carina. He knows me better."

"And you will not stay in England," exclaimed Lucia, hurried by impulse to the betrayal of all her hidden fears: "You will not forget Italy, and give yourself up to your false friends, and live and die amongst heretics."

"My movements must be determined by circumstances," replied the Countess, composedly. "Father Andrea is my counsellor, and what he advises will be done."

"Then we shall return," said Lucia, rising; but her manner was cold, and the Countess's heart reproached her.

"Do not doubt it, dear child," she said; "and for yourself, I have said before, you have but to name the wish, and there shall not be a day's delay."

"No, no," exclaimed Lucia, passionately; "it is always thus: you will not understand, you do not love me."

"Lucia!" the Countess's voice was quiet but reproachful; and the proud spirit of the Italian girl struggled plainly with the warmth of her affections.

"You loved me once," she continued; "in Italy I was your chosen companion, but you turn from me now, you would send me to my country when it is robbed of all that made it precious. I trusted, and I am deceived."

"Lucia, this is language which I must not hear," replied the Countess, "for it is unjust: whilst with me, these scenes must not be repeated."

"Whilst, whilst!" repeated Lucia; "say rather that my trial

will not be long; that you will not bear with me; that even now you have arranged for our separation."

"You speak in wilful error, Lucia," replied Beatrice, with forced serenity of manner; "you do not choose to remember the ties which bind us to each other."

"They may be broken; they are broken," exclaimed Lucia:— she concluded the sentence abruptly; and in a moment recovering the fixed manner which she had assumed at the commencement of the conversation, resumed her work.

The Countess gave way to a slight expression of impatience, but she was vexed with herself the next instant; and after again kissing Lucia affectionately, threw open the window and walked out into the garden. Relief for her spirits was much needed; for this was not the first scene of the kind which she had been compelled to endure in England. Something was happening frequently to call forth Lucia's jealousy; and each time the same reasoning and caressing were required to bring her again into good humour. Beatrice was weary of such a life, yet she was convinced that the fault lay only in an undue affection for herself, and it seemed wrong to return it, as she had done, by cold words and colder looks. No wonder that Lucia was chilled by her manner — she would be more considerate on any future occasion. But the resolution seemed like deception, a show of something which she did not feel. Love could not be watched, and checked or stimulated by prudence: its only value lay in its truth. There was a time — how many days, and weeks, and long, long months did memory retrace, as the thought arose! when every thought was expressed only to be reciprocated: but that could never be again; the void which death had left could never be filled up; and for the few remaining years of her life (something within foretold that they would not be many), the sweetest hope that remained was a dedication of all which could yet be thought valuable to the service of God. In the first dreariness of sorrow after her husband's death, the Countess had looked to a convent as her only place of refuge from an unsympathising world; but her friends, and Father Andrea amongst them, had hesitated to encourage the idea. They saw what the Countess herself could not see, that her rank, and beauty, and talents, were formed for the world, and that the interests of the Church might be furthered by her remaining in it.

Beatrice gave up the idea, though not without great regret, and determined to occupy herself in the concerns of her property. Duty of any kind was a relief to the weight of affliction; and

some who observed the cheerfulness and energy with which she prepared to engage in it, believed that her grief had been quite subdued. By such persons Beatrice Novera was not understood; they witnessed the resignation of a Christian, and they thought that it was the indifference of a common mind. Even Father Andrea was in part deceived, especially during their stay in London. The Countess then saw many of her friends, and received the most flattering attentions. She was, for the time, pleased, and when she said that she was disappointed, and that amongst her numerous relations she had not found one who suited her taste, or with whom she could form a friendship; he imagined that she was ignorant of the state of her own mind, and that at Henningsley she would pine for the society which, when it was possessed, she appeared to value so lightly. His own heart was cast in a stern mould, and its movements were kept in rigid subjection. Life had passed, till the present hour, without bringing any severe trial; and though he had watched deep sorrow often, he had never experienced it himself. He imagined that the Countess could act, as in a similar case he could have acted himself; that she could shake off dejection upon principle, and throw her thoughts into a new channel; and when he saw her cheerful and occupied, he imagined that she had done so. He heard her indeed mourn over past recollections, and complain that life was dreary; but the words were merely words: they were often contradicted by what he saw, and many an anxious thought arose in his breast as he pictured the change which English habits and English affections might possibly make in her character. Beatrice herself did not at first realise the insipidity of the new world into which she was thrown. It was new and amusing, and for a short time she found real pleasure in renewing former acquaintances, and seeing all the wonders of the metropolis. Then the gratification began to pall; she was at home without a home. Her mother's cousin, Lady Anstruther, who had met her at Rouen, and travelled with her to England, proposed that she should take up her residence for some time with her; but this was not practicable, since Father Andrea and Lucia were with her. The large apartments at the hotel, magnificent though they were, grew distasteful, and the Countess sighed for Henningsley.

The warmth of interest also with which she was received lasted much longer than her own satisfaction in it. She had been too much accustomed to homage to be elated by it, and real affection she soon saw was not given her; she even blamed herself for having expected it. How could persons who had not met for

years, and whose lives had been spent under totally different circumstances, and with no unity of sentiment upon religious subjects, be to each other more than common friends? Vexed with her relations, and unhappy in her own mind, Beatrice soon urged an immediate departure. If Henningsley could do no more for her, it could at least give her change; and it would certainly renew the infantine associations which still haunted her indistinctly. It was the home of her father and her mother, and had been the frequent theme of their conversations; and as Beatrice de Lisle, it had been the centre of her own childish imaginations, though, as the Countess Novera, it had been comparatively but seldom remembered.

Father Andrea saw no reason to object, and suddenly, with but two days of preparation, the Countess left London. At the termination of her journey disappointment again awaited her. Henningsley, apparently uninhabited, standing in the middle of a park which gave many indications of being seldom visited, was not an inviting object in its external appearance; and when Beatrice entered the large hall, where no one, except her servants, was waiting to welcome her, and remembered the vague images of life and happiness, which had till that hour been connected with it; a sense of utter solitariness overpowered her. Rank, wealth, beauty, would have been thankfully relinquished for the sake of one fond voice, one kiss of a father, a mother, or a husband's love. No wonder that on the following day, after her conversation with Lucia, the sense of loneliness and want of companionship should sink her spirits to the lowest ebb.

For a long time the Countess wandered by herself through the garden and the shrubberies. They had been lately carefully tended, but taste was still wanting for their perfection. Beatrice, however, gave no attention to them. The characteristic of her mind was that of being entirely possessed by one prominent idea. She walked and gazed, and even gathered flowers, but her thoughts were in a distant land, and it was not until suddenly recalled to her present situation by an object connected with one of the few childish offences which, from being severely punished, had made an indelible impression on her, that she remembered she was in her native home. A piece of trellis work formed one of the terminations of the terrace; and over this some rare creepers had once been trained. The brilliancy of the flowers had tempted her when very young to climb up a few steps, and the consequence had been a fall, and the demolition of a portion of the brittle wood. The offence was a slight one, but it aroused her mother's

fear lest her clambering propensities should lead her into danger; and the punishment was so great that Beatrice believed it to be unjust, and her proud temper rebelled.

Every circumstance was now clearly retraced. The family were then on the eve of departure, and the broken trellis had been left unrepaired. And so it had remained, though not in its original state.

The creepers had overgrown it completely; but as the Countess removed a few of the twining stems, she could perceive the very place where the mischief had been perpetrated. There was no self-command then, and Beatrice rested her head against the trellis work and cried like a little child. She left the terrace hastily, and re-entering the house with a feeling of reverence, determined to examine it well, and endeavoured to fix distinctly the scenes which were either remembered or had been described to her.

But this was found to be no easy task. The rooms which had been prepared for her use were alone habitable, and many of the others were completely blocked up with lumber. One had been originally used as a chapel, but from being the most spacious it was also the most useful and the best filled. And Beatrice turned away from it with increased depression of spirits. It reminded her of the difference between herself and her nearest relations, and made her feel more solitary in the world than before.

She thought of the English girl whom she had seen first at the hotel, and then praying in the Cathedral of St. Ouen, and whose face she had recognised the preceding day. After all, religion was the one great bond, more important far than relationship. And if, in this neighbourhood of strangers, she could meet with one of her own sex to worship in her forms, and with her sincerity, it would do more towards giving her a feeling of home during her stay at Henningsley, than any personal comforts which she might gather around her. Stay, the Countess called it now, for residence she could not believe that it ever would be. She even said to herself that she would leave it in a very few weeks.

All that could be required of her, she thought, would be an inspection of her property, and some inquiries as to her tenants; and when those duties were completed, she would be at liberty to go wherever she chose. Yet Beatrice sighed. Liberty, in many, perhaps in most cases, is a curse and not a blessing.

Father Andrea was then sought, and his advice asked as to the proper mode of gaining minute particulars of the estates, and the manner in which they were overlooked; and two hours after-

wards the Countess was closeted with Mr. Prior, her agent and solicitor, receiving information, and asking questions, which in her ignorance of English laws and customs were confusing to both parties.

CHAPTER XVIII.

It was soon known in the neighbourhood, that the Countess Novera, although unwilling to enter into general society, was still desirous of being introduced to those families who had been personally acquainted with her father and mother; and many, who could lay claim only to a distant knowledge of Lord and Lady de Lisle, hastened to call at Henningsley.

Margaret heard many discussions as to what it would be proper for her mother to do, without venturing a suggestion. Mrs. Percival was a stranger at the time when Henningsley was inhabited; but Dr. Percival was just entering into practice, and had been summoned to a consultation several times in cases of illness. He had been treated with marked courtesy, and had no reason to believe that a visit from any person connected with him would be considered intrusive; but Mrs. Percival rather objected. She said, that the acquaintance was merely professional,—that it would have been very different if it had been of long standing, but in fact it had only lasted about two years, and she had no wish to place herself in a false position by presupposing an intimacy where in fact none had existed — the Countess's stay would probably be very short, and therefore the visit must be a matter of indifference. Mrs. Percival's opinion would have carried the day, and Margaret's reason and taste would have acquiesced, though not without considerable disappointment, but that Mrs. St. Aubyn came unexpectedly to the support of her wishes. She had been at Henningsley, was charmed with the Countess, and convinced that she would in the end decide upon living there. As soon as she had made friends in the neighbourhood, the feeling of loneliness of which she now complained would be gone, and if Mrs. Percival did not call at once, the opportunity of forming the acquaintance would be lost. She had at least as much right as half the people who visited there; for it was well known by many persons that the Viscount de Lisle had entertained a great respect for Dr. Percival's talents, and it was certain that the Countess would receive the visit with pleasure, as she had remem-

bered Dr. Percival's name when it was mentioned, and expressed herself interested in every one connected, however remotely, with her early days. After such counsel, from one so well versed in the ways of the world, Mrs. Percival could no longer doubt; and the visit to Henningsley was fixed for the following day.

Margaret listened with impatience for Agatha's answer to the inquiry, whether she was inclined to go. Lately her sister had appeared averse to morning visits, and it seemed natural enough, since she would of course dislike the observation which under her present circumstances she was likely to excite. Margaret had made up her mind that the reply would be in the negative; and her surprise was as great as her vexation, when Agatha expressed not merely willingness but pleasure in the proposal.

Margaret tried not to be provoked with her, but she could scarcely help being so. It really seemed as if she had been contradictory to her wishes on purpose. Her own introduction to the Countess was not likely, however, to be more than postponed, as Agatha would so shortly be leaving her home; and Margaret endeavoured to be pleased at the future prospect, rather than annoyed at the present disappointment.

She had begun to perceive that every event in life is to be viewed on two sides, and on principle she was teaching herself to look at the brighter one; conscious that whilst she was striving to do her duty, it was also the truer one. Mr. Sutherland, who had not yet left them, felt for her as he always did. He had almost a woman's knack of understanding trifles and their influence upon daily happiness; and, instead of finding fault with Margaret because she looked graver than usual when the carriage drove off, he made her confess her vexation and talk of it till it was nearly gone. Still it returned again when Agatha came back, for she would tell nothing; or perhaps she had nothing to tell. The room had been filled with visitors, and she had scarcely spoken to the Countess. Mrs. Percival declared herself very glad that she had gone, but said she was rather disappointed in the Countess. There was more of reserve about her than she had anticipated: some persons might have fancied it hauteur, but that was not her opinion. It was shyness evidently; she did not fully comprehend English fashions, and there was something strange in her foreign accent and idiom, considering her birth. The Romish confessor had not been seen; it was understood, indeed, that he kept himself quite aloof from every one; but there was a young girl present,—a companion most probably, who talked very little, and looked melancholy; and this was all Margaret could learn.

"Your curiosity will be satisfied by and by, Margaret," said Mr. Sutherland, as he watched the slight annoyance expressed in her countenance. "Remember there will be no one to take your place when Agatha is gone."

"I do not think that will make much difference," said Margaret: "it is foolish in me to look forward to anything like real knowledge or intimacy. There are different circles in life, and they are not meant to mingle."

"No, and if they do, one seldom sees happiness to be the result —unequal marriages, for instance."

"I agree with you entirely there," said Margaret;" but I am not sure that I do about friendships and society; the difference of rank, I always fancy, must increase the charm."

"I don't pretend to know," said Mr. Sutherland. "I never had any friends except humdrum country rectors and curates, or fellows of colleges; but do you think, Margaret, that friendships, any more than human beings, can live upon pound cake?"

"You mean the romance one reads of in novels," said Margaret; "but that would not be mine."

"But any kind of romance, — don't you think it requires, besides, some less ethereal food: mutual sympathy about pet cats and dogs; and, perhaps, a little good-natured gossip, such as Miss Debrett would give?"

"No, indeed!" exclaimed Margaret, "a gossiping friendship! I could not even imagine it."

"Well, I suppose I am mistaken; but I always fancy (I dare say I have gained the notion from books) that these things are the cement which bind the friendship together. I know for myself that my best friend takes a lively interest in the welfare of Prince, and would be really disappointed if he did not know exactly how my garden flourishes."

"According to the elegant proverb, 'Love me, love my dog,'" said Margaret.

"Yes; and I don't quite see how this is to be managed where tnere is great disparity of rank. I don't understand how you would make the Countess Novera sympathise with your dread of one of Miss Debrett's visits, or with the difficulties you have with the children."

"How absurd you are!" exclaimed Margaret, laughing; "as if such sympathy was necessary."

"Remember, I did not say it was; I asked merely as a matter of curiosity."

"If I were to know the Countess Novera intimately," observed

Margaret, "I hope we should find sufficient subjects for mutual interest, without being obliged to have recourse to either Miss Debrett or the children."

"You would discuss Tasso and Dante from morning till night at first; but that presupposes that you are always to be in the mood. Now, you know, Margaret, that even the wisest must descend to earth sometimes; and then it strikes me that you would find yourselves living, one at the north and the other at the south pole."

"Perhaps so," replied Margaret, carelessly; "but I cannot believe that that sort of thing would cause any diminution of real affection."

Mr. Sutherland smiled, and giving her a kiss, he said, "That is a very young hope, my child. Depend upon it you and I should not love each other half as happily, or as unchangeably, if you were a rich duchess, whilst I was a poor vicar with three hundred and fifty pounds a year."

"I am glad you said as happily, and not as well," observed Margaret.

"I have meant happily all along. Difference of rank, I suspect, acts as a hot-bed. Affection is precocious and luxuriant, but not healthy. So I will promise to love you always, whether you marry the Great Mogul or remain Margaret Percival to the end of your days; but I do not promise always to enter into your feelings when you order your black slaves about; and I shall not expect you to enter into mine, when I go and inquire after Humphrey Jackson and his rheumatism."

"And the end of all is, that I am not to throw away my admiration upon the Countess Novera," replied Margaret.

"Not exactly; because if I were in a lecturing humour, I should give you a caution there upon more important grounds."

"Acknowledge that you are never very much disinclined to lecture," said Margaret, in a playful tone.

"No, indeed, I will not, because I am just going to spare you a discourse upon the dangers of an intimacy with a Romanist."

"But why spare me? I always listen very patiently."

"First, because I have promised Philip he shall have a ride upon Prince round the field; and next, because I see no probability of your being thrown in the way of temptation. The Countess does not intend to live at Henningsley; Mr. Prior informed me of that yesterday."

Mr. Sutherland did not perceive Margaret's face of disappointment. He went away, and she was left to think upon the

disagreeable conversation. Her uncle had not meant that it should be so, but disagreeable it undoubtedly was. If she had only told him her prepossession in favour of the Countess before, he would have assumed another tone; but he discussed the matter as if it were of no consequence, and his objections appeared unsatisfactory. Margaret had no doubt herself, that if the Countess were all she resolved she must be, a friendship with her would be a great addition to her happiness. She did not form any particular wishes, because she saw very little chance of their accomplishment; but if the opportunity offered itself, she could discover no reason whatever to draw back, merely because they were not equals in rank. The religion was a more important difference, but it did not seem insurmountable; they need not interfere with each other, and there would be no occasion to touch upon it. Margaret was vexed with her uncle, as she had been once before. She said to herself that no woman would have been so blind as not to perceive that such a light way of talking annoyed her, yet she could not think of telling him so: her reserve came in the way, and it did not seem worth while to make a remark about such a trifle. It would only worry him, she thought; and the best thing would be not to mention the Countess's name for the future. She could not be annoyed then; and when Henningsley was again left deserted, as most probably it would soon be, her own feelings were likely to die away. Margaret saw no fault in her reserve, and perhaps it would be hard to call it one; but she had misled her uncle, though unintentionally. She had lately given him the idea that she could talk to him openly upon every subject, and, till this instance, she had not failed to do it. He had no reason, therefore, to suspect anything beyond a passing inclination to call upon a lady whose rank and beauty rendered her an object of attraction, and he had treated it accordingly. Margaret grew more reserved the more she thought upon what he had said; and she did not even ask him why he spoke of danger in an intimacy with a Romanist, though at the moment she had rather wished to learn. She shut herself up, and was silent; and Mr. Sutherland noticed this, and supposed she was thinking of Agatha. His manner was particularly affectionate all the evening, and Margaret blamed herself for unkindness towards him; still she did not alter her own manner, nor make the least allusion to Henningsley, nor ask any more questions about the Countess. Her mother even declared that she had no curiosity, because she took so little part in the remarks which were made at intervals about the visit; and at last Margaret retired to bed, earlier than

usual, very dissatisfied with herself for being cross, and resolving to forget the conversation as soon as possible.

Mr. Sutherland was to return to Alton the next morning, and not to be at the Grove again till the day preceding Agatha's wedding. Margaret had dexterously suggested Dean Clive as the most proper person to perform the ceremony; and Mrs. Percival seized upon the idea, hinted it to the Colonel, who highly approved, and made excuses to her brother for not asking him. Mr. Sutherland was full of gratitude to Margaret for her management; and in the few moments when they were together alone, he did as he had never done before. He spoke of himself, of his long attachment, and his flattering hopes, and their bitter disappointment; and when he said that he trusted he was now resigned and thankful; he also added, that within the last year, he had ceased to look upon his situation as lonely; Margaret's affection had thrown a sunshine over his life. Margaret's heart painfully reproached her: she could not bear to be reserved upon a subject of no consequence, when he was so open upon one on which the happiness of his life had rested. If it had been the moment for mentioning herself, she would have confessed her folly; but she did not think it was, and it would be easier perhaps to write than to speak, and so they parted, — Mr. Sutherland to his parish duties, and Margaret to prepare for taking the children for a walk.

CHAPTER XIX.

Since receiving her uncle's hints upon education, Margaret had made some progress in more judicious management; and as a consequence she was much more popular. It is not strictness which children dislike, but inconsistency and caprice. There was frequently now a contest for her hand, for Margaret had learned to listen whilst Philip repeated the old stories he had been reading; and to bear with Grace's descriptions of all the wonderful things she should buy if she were rich. One of her great temptations now was to be constantly correcting. From natural quickness she readily perceived the germs of faults, and since she had begun to watch the children from principle, her consciousness of them had become a sort of instinct. She could descry conceit in the merest intonation of Grace's voice, and the tone in which Harriet begged to be allowed to turn back because

she was tired was distressing; it told so plainly of indolence. Margaret was not yet mistress of two very essential qualifications for those who would win the hearts as well as rule the actions of children. She could not see a fault without remarking upon it; and she could not give a playful reproof. It was clear that she often irritated the children, especially Harriet; but it was difficult to discover why. Complaints, she knew, she did not make without cause, but the mistake lay in making them too seriously. Margaret's was rather a Draconian code. It had the same grave look and reproachful manner for a passing forgetfulness, as for a wilful neglect; and Harriet, who had by nature a matter-of-fact but discriminating mind, was fretted by the exaggeration, and lost a great deal of the good which she might otherwise have gained from her sister's care. But Margaret's errors in judgment and practice were open to correction merely by her own observation. She had no theories, and she was resolved, as far as possible, to guard her own conduct, and to act out everything which she wished the children to do.

The idea of working for anything beyond, it was not easy to realise. Margaret did not forget what her uncle had said upon the subject of the Church. She thought of it a good deal, but it did not seem in the least practical. As a matter of history its claims were well known to her; but every one around her seemed to have forgotten them. She daily heard Baptists, and Wesleyans, and the innumerable sects of Dissenters with which Staunton and Deering abounded, spoken of in the same terms as the Church; and she knew that half the charities of the place were carried on through their instrumentality. It did not appear right and liberal to attach herself entirely to her own communion, when others, more active and self-denying, were working good, or what seemed to be good, around her. She feared it would engender an exclusive spirit, and so she endeavoured to take an enlarged view; to look upon herself as a member, not merely of the Church of England, but of the great Christian family throughout the world. And to work for such a body, how could it be done? Where was the organisation? where were the laws? where was the controlling power? The whole was one mass of conflicting opinions, rival authorities, disputed dogmas. There was no such liberality to be found amongst Dissenters as Margaret was inclined to practise; for each party strenuously asserted its own rights. If the points upon which they disagreed were of importance, truth must be confined to one sect alone; and how then did this differ from Mr. Sutherland's principle of the Church being the only safe

rock on which to rest? If the points were not of importance, why were they not yielded? For the spread of Christianity alone, such a submission was imperatively required. Margaret could come to no satisfactory conclusion, but, as her thoughts had been hasty, she intended to consider the subject more fully when she was at leisure, and afterwards to place her difficulties before her uncle. In the meantime, having begun by a fear of exclusiveness, if she confined herself too strictly to the Church, she ended by setting aside the idea of a great Christian family, and resolving to limit her efforts principally to the members of her own. She would pray for them, plan for them, and try to believe that her whole business in life was to do them good.

There was no favourable opportunity for renewing the conversation before Mr. Sutherland went away. It required first to be well weighed, and Margaret's attention was not sufficiently disengaged for such topics. Agatha's time was given up to amusement and wedding preparations, and her few duties of writing notes and receiving visitors were therefore added to her sister's daily employments. Yet Margaret was not irritated. She knew that an appointed task was before her, apportioned not by man but God; and to please him was in itself both motive and recompense. The question was not what she did, but how; and the zest with which she seized a few spare moments for study was a compensation for many daily annoyances. The children's walk was now rather a pleasure than not, as it took her from home at the time when she was most liable to interruption. Still it was a trial of patience when they were sent to dress themselves. Grace and Philip generally contrived to quarrel about gloves, and Harriet, three days out of the four, lost hers. Margaret was generally ready, and had called them repeatedly before either of them appeared, and by the delay a quarter of an hour was perhaps lost —a very small portion of time for some persons, but a very important one for Margaret, who was always obliged to be out with them for two hours, calculated from the moment they left the house. The time between walking and dinner was her own, and this quarter of an hour was perpetually subtracted from it by the children's carelessness and dawdling habits. She could make little use of it, for she was most frequently required to settle the disputes, or to find what was lost; and if this were not the case, her mother generally knocked three or four times at her door to bid her "go and hurry the little ones, for the beauty of the day was passing." Margaret tried to remedy the evil by allowing a certain number of minutes; but they were sure to be infringed upon, and

the few punishments which she was allowed to inflict were thought nothing of. She gave lectures upon neatness, and did her utmost towards setting an example, and this was in some degree efficacious; but still the cure was not complete: for some reason or other Margaret was kept waiting every day. Her old irritability returned upon her, and the offence was considered great, and reproved accordingly. "If you grow up with these habits," she said, in her gravest voice, as Harriet joined her after a delay of at least twenty minutes, partly caused by having remained in the hall to say good bye to her uncle, instead of putting the school-room closet in order, as she had been told; "if you really do not try more to conquer these careless, tiresome ways, you will be fit for nothing. No one will ever trust you, or depend upon you. You will be useless all your life."

"But indeed, Margaret, I made as much haste as I could. It was only because of uncle Henry, else I should have put the closet to rights directly after dinner."

"It does not signify to give reasons," replied Margaret: "it is your fault, and you must get the better of it. Every one in the house is put out by your dawdling. You know, the day before yesterday, when Agatha and Mrs. St. Aubyn were going to take you out, you kept the carriage five-and-twenty minutes."

"Only ten," said Harriet, rather angrily, "because I looked at the hall clock, and saw; and yesterday I was ready before any one."

"You have a bad habit of excusing yourself, Harriet," continued Margaret: "you know very well that I don't mean to speak of any particular instance; but it is your defect; you never can exert yourself,—you will not hurry in the least; I cannot think what you will do when you grow up to be a woman."

"I did hurry as much as I could," muttered Harriet, following her sister into the garden, where Grace and Philip were playing.

Margaret did not vent her feelings upon the two little ones, though many in her situation might have been tempted to do it. Her temper was becoming more under control every day; and finding herself annoyed by one fault, she was careful not to be captious about others. Her summons to Grace and her brother was made in a very good-humoured tone, and each seizing a hand, and declaring that Harriet had walked with Margaret only yesterday, and therefore it was their turn to-day, they set out.

"Which way are we to go?" was Philip's first inquiry.

"I don't know; which way do you wish? Ashington, or the

river, or Milford Hill, or the Eastlake road; which do you like best?"

"I thought we were all to go into the town, to choose a locket for our hair for Agatha," said Grace.

"No, I must do that alone by and by," replied Margaret.

Harriet had been walking by herself, with something of sullenness in her countenance. "Now, didn't you think so?" said Grace, appealing to her. "Didn't mamma tell us we might go and choose for ourselves?"

"No," answered Harriet, who was remarkable for exactness in all she asserted. "Mamma said perhaps Margaret would bring us some to choose from."

"Well, that is the same sort of thing; we are to choose."

"No, Grace," observed Margaret, "it is not the same. I wish you would learn to be as particular as Harriet in repeating things."

Harriet's face a little brightened, for she was peculiarly sensitive to praise, perhaps from the very fact of having so little of it. Margaret noticed this, and was pleased, as she had not intended to give more than a gentle reproof, and had rather wondered at Harriet's sulkiness. When it was settled that they should take the Eastlake road and return over Milford Hill, she sent the children on before, that she might have a few moments for considering what she had said. It was all very true;—dawdling was a serious fault, most tormenting to every one; but it was not quite as certain that, if Harriet were a dawdle, when she grew up she would be fit for nothing, or that no one would ever trust her, or that she would be useless all her life. There was a degree of truth in each of the assertions, but then each was exaggerated. Neither was it the case that Harriet *never* did exert herself, that she would not hurry *in the least.* Margaret had perceived an instance of her efforts only the day before, and naturally the reproof had appeared unfair. All this Margaret saw, because she was willing to see it. Self-examination with her was no form, it was the inquiry of a lowly, sincere mind, and whatever were the errors that it brought to light she never shut her eyes to them. How to remedy her mistake was now the question. The fault must not be overlooked, because it might really be of consequence; and after having spoken of it so gravely, it would not do to treat it lightly. There was another alternative, and as they were returning home Margaret called the little girl to her, and finding that she was no longer out of humour, proposed that instead of going home she should walk with her into the town to assist in choosing the locket. "Perhaps she would know better than her-

self," she said, "what Grace and Philip would like, and it would not do to take them, they were so troublesome in shops."

Harriet was delighted, and even the two little ones were more satisfied, as they said that Harriet was much more likely to buy pretty things than Margaret, because Margaret never cared about brooches and lockets. They knew she had a great many, but she never put them on like Agatha.

Margaret laughed, and assured them that some day or other, just to satisfy them, she would dress herself out beautifully; and Philip, protesting he would make her do it the very day Agatha was married, ran into the house with Grace, whilst Harriet and Margaret went on into the town. Harriet had both forgotten and forgiven, and talked without restraint, and Margaret entered into all she said, and described the sort of locket which they would be likely to get for the sum they had to spend. Or should it be a brooch? Lockets were very pretty, but brooches were more useful, and perhaps they might meet with one which it would suit Agatha to wear every day, so that she might always have something to remind her of them. Harriet's interest in the purchase increased, when she found that her sister deemed it worthy of consideration, and she did not once remember that Marg ret had been harsh. Margaret, however, did, and the idea presented itself more strongly than before, that perhaps Harriet's was a disposition to be governed by kindness rather than by strict rules. At any rate there could be no harm in making the experiment on which she had determined.

"I will tell you one reason, Harriet," she said, as a pause occurred in the conversation, "why I am particularly anxious to go out soon in the afternoon; because if I don't, I have so little time to myself. It is only the hour before dinner which I can be certain of having for reading, and if we come in late I can't do anything, and I was thinking just now that if I mentioned this you would be glad to help me by being quick; besides trying to get rid of a fault."

"I do mean to try to-morrow," replied Harriet, "and I was very sorry I vexed you; but, do you know, Margaret, I did not think at all how late it was till I heard Grace say she was ready. I was waiting for uncle Henry."

"He made us all late," said Margaret; "but he won't be here to-morrow, and then if you will see that Grace and Philip go upstairs when dinner is over, I dare say we shall be able to manage better."

There was no acknowledgment in this that Margaret had been

in the wrong, for it would have lowered herself, and been out of place: but the turn of the sentence was conciliatory, and Harriet grew more ashamed of her provoking habits than she had been after the most severe lecture.

"You shall have a whole hour to yourself to-morrow, Margaret: just see if you don't. We will all try which can be ready first; that was what made us so quick yesterday; Grace and I had a race."

Margaret thanked her, and called her "dear child;" and Harriet stroked her sister's hand, and said she liked walking out with her of all things. Margaret lightly hinted, that if she intended to be first in the race to-morrow, the gloves must be put away carefully at night; and then, as they had reached the jeweller's, the conversation dropped. Mr. Lovell's was an extremely good shop for a country town, and rather the fashion. Mrs. St. Aubyn herself had not hesitated to patronise it, and Margaret had no doubt of soon finding what was wanted. But of all the minor difficulties of life, that of choosing a wedding present, when children are to be the donors, is one of the most difficult. Margaret turned over a very handsome assortment of brooches, lockets, and rings, and selected the few which suited the price that was to be given; but Harriet, having been permitted to see the wonders of the glass cases on the counters, could be contented with nothing of an inferior order. She would not look at a plain gold locket, nor even a small turquoise brooch. She had set her heart upon one set with pearls and rubies, and it was with difficulty she could be persuaded that all her pocket money, and Grace and Philip's together would not purchase it. Her godmamma, she said, had sent her a sovereign about two months ago, and she would give it willingly for the pearl and ruby brooch. The shopman smiled, and assured her, that many sovereigns would not be sufficient, and then begging Margaret to excuse him, he hurried away to attend to some new customers. Margaret was trying to persuade Harriet to be satisfied, when a woman came up to them and proposed to show them a set of trinkets which had just arrived. Some were French, remarkably elegant, and not at all expensive. Fresh drawers were placed before them, and Harriet's expressions of delight drew the attention of a lady who had last entered. She came near, and Margaret in an instant knew the melodious, but very peculiar tones, which inquired if it was much the custom in England to receive jewellery from France. The Countess Novera was standing close beside her. If she had only been in Agatha's place, she might have spoken, now they could only meet as

strangers. Yet it was a great pleasure to feel, that she might listen to, and even look at her occasionally, and her thoughts were quite diverted from the wedding presents, in her dread lest the Countess should go. Margaret was not aware of her own attractions; the Countess was fully as unwilling to depart as she was to lose her, and lingered under pretence of examining some watch-seals, whilst Harriet endeavoured to make a decision. "This is beautiful," and "this is extremely elegant," and "I am sure, Miss, you must think this lovely:" were phrases repeated, at least, a dozen times; but they had only the effect of bewildering Harriet's judgment, and Margaret was going to tell her that she really must choose at once, when the shopwoman opened another drawer, and taking from it several small boxes, said, as she opened one, and held up the ornament it contained:—

"What do you think of this, Miss? we have sold several."

It was a silver crucifix.

Margaret uttered an exclamation of indignant horror! "Sell them for ornaments! impossible!"

"Oh, yes, ma'am, we do. Some ladies admire them extremely; and you know crosses are quite the fashion."

Fashion! what a word to be applied to the emblem of all that is most awful and humbling in the history of redemption! Margaret closed the box, and said gravely, "I can scarcely imagine that crucifixes have ever been purchased as ornaments, though you may have sold them."

"I don't know, I am sure, ma'am," said the shopwoman, rather pertly. "Crosses are constantly. You may have seen them probably."

A sigh escaped from Margaret, and she turned away with pain and disgust. To sell crucifixes, and even crosses, merely as ornaments, was only on a par with the putting up in a window the engravings of our blessed Lord by the side of a head of Cæsar, or Napoleon, or the prints of the blind fiddler, a sight which met her eye whenever she passed through Staunton. If we will play, as it were, with the few visible signs which are granted us of those tremendous truths on which our everlasting happiness depends, it can be no matter of surprise if the truths themselves become unreal; if we hear, and read, and speak of our Lord and Saviour with no more vivid consciousness of His existence, than we have of the labours of Hercules, or the lives of the Roman kings, which modern historians have pronounced to be a myth. Margaret would always have thought that irreverence was displayed in a crucifix: merely as a matter of taste, it would have been offensive

to her: but the feeling was now much deeper. She immediately began to hurry Harriet, and insisted upon setting aside the trinkets, which alone could be chosen, being at the moment only desirous of ridding herself of the forward shopwoman. Before this was done Mrs. Percival unexpectedly came in. She said but a few words, though sufficient to show their relationship, when Margaret contrived to make her aware of the presence of the Countess, who had retired to a little distance. Mrs. Percival did not suppose it likely that she should be remembered, having been only one amongst a crowd of visitors. To her surprise, however, the Countess came forward, as soon as she perceived her, and entered into conversation. Margaret stood by, longing to be introduced, and wondering what the exact rule of etiquette would be. The Countess made some remarks upon the town, and its neatness and convenience; but her eye wandered constantly to Margaret; and at length, when the few desultory subjects were exhausted, and parting civilities might naturally have been expected, she said almost abruptly:—

"I think I can scarcely be mistaken. I have had the pleasure of seeing one of your daughters; may I be allowed to form the acquaintance of another?"

Margaret's deep blush spoke of pleasure and shyness, and perhaps a little shame for having been already in fancy so intimate with a stranger. The Countess delicately covered her embarrassment by continuing to address her without requiring an answer; and in a few moments Margaret was at ease, and entering readily into the smooth and graceful flow of the Countess's conversation. Mrs. Percival naturally felt gratified; but neither rank, nor beauty, nor even eloquence, could induce her to forget that she had business to attend to, and after a little while she desired Margaret not to keep Harriet out too long, and departed."

"You are in a hurry, I fear," said the Countess, when she noticed that Margaret laid her hand upon the parcel, apparently intending to follow. "Is your sister an invalid?"

Margaret could not refrain from a smile, as she thought how little the Countess would be likely to understand the way in which every one at the Grove was kept under rule, and merely answered in the negative, adding, that "she could not say she was in a hurry, for the walk home was a short one."

"I passed your house, I think," said the Countess, "as I came from Henningsley. It stands back from the road on the right hand side, does it not?"

"Yes, about three quarters of a mile it is reckoned to be from the town."

"Then you are not more than half a mile from the lodge-gate at Henningsley. I had no idea we were such near neighbours; for in a new country it is not easy to calculate distances."

Margaret merely replied that there was no house nearer to the Grove in that direction, and then again took up her parcel, intending to go.

The Countess went to the door of the shop, and remarked "that it looked very threatening; she was afraid Miss Percival might have an unpleasant walk home if the storm came on. Her carriage would call for her in a few minutes; might she be permitted to offer a seat in it."

Margaret did not consider the probabilities or non-probabilities of a storm; the offer was quite a sufficient inducement, and with evident pleasure and thanks it was accepted.

The Countess was satisfied; and although the carriage was delayed longer than she expected, seemed contented to remain in the inner part of the shop, where they could be free from observation, and did not once express either wonder or impatience.

Margaret could not help perceiving that there was something more than common courtesy in the attention paid her, but she could not account for it; she was too simple-minded to imagine that her personal attractions, either of appearance or manner, could be the cause; and at length, with her usual rapidity, came to the conclusion, that in some way or other such cordiality from a stranger must be owing to Mrs. St. Aubyn. There was no pause in the conversation until the arrival of the carriage. Margaret was led on she knew not how; but the Countess spoke of Italy, its scenery and historical associations, and Margaret's imagination was wrought upon, until she found herself expressing freely, sentiments and feelings, upon which, even with her uncle, she might have had some reserve. The Countess was evidently enthusiastic, and highly educated; and no more fruitful source of mutual interest could be found than the country she loved so well; and Margaret entered warmly into the subjects brought forward, without the most distant idea of making a display of her acquirements; in fact, they were so common that she never thought about them, except to lament that they were superficial. The Countess, however, did not fully understand the degree of refinement and cultivation now generally attained by English girls; and it was a source of as much surprise as pleasure to find that she could mention Petrarch and Tasso, and even indulge herself by speaking the

language which had become more familiar than her native tongue, and yet be understood. She had hoped to find unity of faith upon religious subjects, as she had still little doubt that her new acquaintance was a Romanist; but she had not ventured to look forward to anything like the congeniality of taste, which, notwithstanding Margaret's diffidence, could not be concealed.

"It is such a pleasure," she said, in reply to an observation upon the beauties and peculiarities of some of the modern Italian novels, "to meet with any one who will discuss these things 'con amore.' Every one talks to me about them, as a matter of course; but I see directly that it is of course, and then I do not care for it."

"Yet the language is generally read now," replied Margaret; "and I should have supposed that persons who can appreciate English poetry would in the same way enter into Italian."

"Do you ever find any one talk to you willingly about it?" inquired the Countess.

"Seldom; but then I consider it my own fault. I do not know enough to bring the subject forward, or to pursue it if it is begun."

"Nay, that can scarcely be," said the Countess, laughing, "considering all the knowledge you have been betraying."

Margaret coloured, and said that she had no idea of betraying knowledge; she had spoken only as she felt, and it was perfectly true that her acquaintance with Italian was very limited. She had principally taught herself, and though she could understand, she had considerable difficulty in speaking it. The Countess's reply was made in Italian; and gracefully, yet with a smile and intonation which removed every idea of striving after effect, she expressed her hope that whilst she remained at Henningsley, they might meet so often as mutually to benefit each other. "My foreign idiom," she added, "is sometimes sorely perplexing to my English attendants and the tradespeople; but I am endeavouring to improve by teaching a young friend who is with me, and whom I shall hope soon to have the pleasure of introducing to you."

Margaret could have answered readily in her own tongue, but the Italian failed her completely; and as she was hesitating and laughing at her difficulty, the carriage drove up. Harriet alone was glad to see it, for after the amusement in watching a stranger was over, she grew tired of waiting; especially since she could no longer look at the ornaments with any hope of purchasing them. The Countess apologised for her servant's neglect, but gave no orders for any extra haste; and Margaret secretly wished that three miles instead of three quarters of a mile, had been the length of the proposed drive. Harriet carefully kept possession

of the trinket box, for she saw that Margaret had forgotten it; but the Countess noticed it, and seizing upon the opportunity to allude to the one subject on which she supposed they had a common interest, said: "You were shocked just now at that woman's irreverence; yet living in this country, I should have imagined you were accustomed to it."

"I—I beg your pardon;—yes, I was shocked certainly; every one must have been," replied Margaret, with great hesitation, for she could not understand what seemed the awkwardness of such a speech.

"I mean it is the usual tone with Protestants," continued the Countess. "Things which we deem sacred, and use in our churches and oratories, and for aids to private devotion, they either discard altogether, or turn into ornaments."

Margaret was still more puzzled. "I do not think that Protestants possessed of right feeling do so," she answered; "careless minds must be the same everywhere."

"But it is almost unavoidable; it is the defect of their faith; its peculiar mark. They are so spiritual that they cannot attach sanctity to anything visible."

"Indeed! I think you are mistaken; I am sure you would find it otherwise," continued Margaret, becoming really distressed.

"Ah! that is because you have lived amongst them so long. You cannot see with the eyes of those who come from the very source and spring-head of our most holy faith. You would speak differently if you had witnessed the gorgeousness of southern worship. The Catholic religion in England is mutilated."

"But," said Margaret, in a tone the firmness of which showed that she was not speaking naturally, "I do not think the gorgeousness of any worship would have attractions for me. I am a Protestant."

The Countess bent forward suddenly, and her complexion varied from its clear delicate colour to one of extreme paleness; and then as the blood again rushed to her face, until it dyed her forehead, she said, in a low voice, "You must pardon me, I have been under great error. I thought we both professed the one true ——." She stopped and added more quickly, "Surely we met before in the church of St. Ouen?"

Poor Margaret saw directly the secret of the Countess's attention; she was valued not for herself, but for the Church to which she was supposed to belong. The disappointment was greater than she could conceal, and the Countess construed it into annoyance. "I am so grieved, so extremely pained," she said. "Nay, ex-

cuse me" (the carriage had reached the Grove, and they were about to enter the gates), "you must let me carry you on a little farther."

Margaret made no objection, and recovering herself, hastened to assure the Countess that no pardon was needed. The mistake was natural, and she could only regret that it should give her a moment's pain.

"Yet I ought to have imagined — and my words, they were so thoughtless," — began the Countess. And after a little consideration she added, "But surely you were at St. Ouen?"

"Yes," replied Margaret; "and I felt there what it seems to me every one instinctively would feel in such a place."

"My prejudices must seem to you quite uncharitable," said the Countess; "but have you never been in Italy?"

"I have never even been on the Continent, except for that one short week."

"Then you cannot have remarked the irreverence, the sneers, of the visitors." "The English," Beatrice was going to add, but she corrected herself, and again slightly colouring, said that she had been so persuaded Margaret was not a Protestant that she could not in a moment divest herself of the idea.

"Protestant is a name held in little estimation by you, I fear," said Margaret, feeling shame for the conduct which she knew must have given rise to the odium.

"Not Protestantism which can appreciate and worship in St. Ouen," replied the Countess, with a smile of peculiar sweetness.

"Yet you must think us in great error?"

"Yes, of course, I must; but piety under whatever form is worthy of honour."

"And you do not deny the possibility of its existence amongst us?" inquired Margaret.

"No, no; I must indeed have given a false impression, if you could for one moment think it."

Margaret was sorry that she had spoken, for she saw that the Countess was pained.

"Do not think hardly of me," continued Beatrice; "if, that is, you can really forgive; and let me hope that we may meet frequently."

She held out her hand, and Margaret, even more gratified than before, received her advances in a way which gave full proof that the apology had been taken as it was meant. The Countess insisted upon alighting at her own lodge, and sending back Margaret and Harriet in the carriage; and when they had driven off she walked slowly and thoughtfully towards the house.

CHAPTER XX.

When the Countess Novera retraced the conversation between herself and Margaret, she was conscious of having been carried by impulse much farther than reason would have led her.

The mere prepossession in favour of a stranger, gathered from a transitory meeting, or even the idea that they were united in belief upon religious subjects, ought not in prudence to have resulted in such an evident desire to cultivate an intimacy, as she had during their short interview been induced to show.

Yet Beatrice could not bring herself to regret what had taken place. Even though her hopes of sympathy upon the most important point were destroyed, she still felt that a charm remained. Margaret was unlike any one she had yet seen. The Countess's knowledge of English girls was principally confined to those whom she had met upon the Continent, and to the many to whom she had been introduced, but with whom she had never become intimate in London. She had admired many for their beauty, and had learnt to think highly of their refinement and amiability; but in Margaret there was something which to her was more fascinating. All her remarks showed a freshness and simplicity which, when joined to the talents so unconsciously displayed, awoke an interest such as Beatrice had not imagined it possible that one whom she deemed a heretic could inspire. But although she could not regret the cordiality which had been shown, the Countess did not fail to reproach herself. Father Andrea had feared that she might care too much for her English friends; and if this could not be the case here (since she could not be supposed to care for Margaret), still it was true that she looked forward to seeing her again with a pleasure which ought scarcely to be associated with a person beyond the pale of the Church, and till that day a perfect stranger. Could it be that her zeal for the cause which had once been so dear to her was diminishing? A susceptible conscience made her dread lest it should be so. Certainly she had received much kindness in England, and though she could not find happiness in it, she could never look upon it with cold indifference, as she had done before. With the candour which her pride could never destroy, Beatrice went instantly to Father Andrea. He was in his study, reading. A heap of letters and half-written papers lay beside him, for his correspondence

was large; and since he came to England his advice and support had been required by many of the influential members of his communion. Beatrice excused herself for interrupting him, but Father Andrea's face was a sufficient assurance that the excuse was not required. The one vulnerable point in his otherwise stern character was his affection for her. He removed his books, and placing a chair for her, smiled as she regretted the inconvenience to which he was subjected, and entreated that he would allow her to provide him a larger apartment.

"It is ample for my needs, my daughter," he said. "Even if it were a prisoner's cell, it would be more than my deserts; and they who are pilgrims upon earth, should take little count of the hostelries in which for the time they dwell. But you are vexing yourself without cause. I have all that I want, or could even find it in my heart to wish for."

"So you have said always, father," replied the Countess, "yet it is natural that I should desire your comfort; and you deny me a pleasure when you will not attend to it."

"The chief comfort that I require is always at my command," replied the confessor, "and for earthly blessings, I have the privilege of watching over your happiness, my daughter, and studying for the advancement of our holy Church."

"Oh, that I could be like you, father!" exclaimed the Countess, "never to forget, and turn aside. But that great weakness which I have mourned over so often—it will never leave me. It is the mood of the moment which governs me now, as it did when first I knelt before you to confess my childish faults."

"And is the mood of the moment a wrong one now?" inquired the confessor.

"You would think it so," she replied, "because you can never be led away by any charm of manner to overlook a vital difference of principle. But, father, it is only self-distrust which makes me speak thus. I have met the English girl whom I first saw kneeling at St. Ouen. She is not one of us, as I imagined. She is a heretic. Yet I cannot think of her as such; I am still attracted by her, and I would fain see her again. Can it be lukewarmness which is the cause?"

"Kneeling in the church of St. Ouen?" repeated the father, thoughtfully. "Did you say you had spoken to her?"

"Yes, we have spent some time in conversation. She is not like others whom I have seen; she is full of poetry, and enthusiasm, and devotion. Her mind is not fitted for the chilling creed of a Protestant."

"And you are likely to know more of her?" inquired Father Andrea, with the same abstracted air.

"Yes, if there be no evil in my own heart to prevent it. I can scarcely avoid it, indeed; for I made advances under the belief that she was a Catholic, and unintentionally said things which were painful to her, and as I apologised warmly, I must seem capricious unless I act up to my words. Her family, too, have called, so that we must keep up some acquaintance."

Father Andrea laid down his pen, and sat thoughtfully for a few moments.

"If you must be intimate," he said, "why should I be consulted?"

"Oh, father, but you know that I could not be so without your sanction. I would risk anything rather than encourage what you disapprove."

"My full sanction cannot be given suddenly, my daughter. Yet if there were no taint of infirmity about us, we might mix with heretics, and be the means of their salvation without endangering our own."

"I am infirm, I know," said the Countess, in a tone of meekness which was natural to her only when religion was the topic of conversation; "but, father, I would die; yes,"—and the meekness passed away, and the intensity of devotion was heard in its stead,—"God is my witness, I would die for our Holy Church!"

"Heaven bless you, my daughter!" replied Father Andrea, fervently. "Follow your own will; watch yourself carefully; neglect no single duty, either of prayer, or penance, or fasting, and let the intimacy of which you have spoken be guided by circumstances."

Beatrice rose, and as she was leaving the room she said—

"You will remember Lucia, father: her present temper must be utterly destructive of my comfort; and you alone have power over her."

Father Andrea promised that he would talk to her in the course of the day; but when Beatrice departed, he had no thought to bestow upon any subject but the permission which he had just given for an intercourse, which it was clear the Countess herself had considered open to objection. Father Andrea reasoned long with himself, and scrutinised carefully the dangers which might arise. Yet his decision was still the same. A character such as the Countess had described was, he believed, far more likely to be induced to look favourably upon the Romish Church, by the attraction of the Countess's society, than to exercise any perma-

nent influence in the opposite direction. There had been indeed once a passing fear in his mind, lest Beatrice should, in England, be drawn to the religion of her relations. It was the fear he had expressed before Lucia, and which had finally determined her upon accompanying the Countess; but since his stay in London this fear had vanished. Beatrice had never expressed the least sympathy, or even curiosity, upon the subject. Many things indeed had seemed repugnant to her. The closed churches, the unsightly monuments of St. Paul's and Westminster Abbey, and the demands for payment where abroad all would have been open. She found fault, too, with the inconsistency which could insist so strongly upon the observance of the day of rest, and yet keep open the opera-house till the latest hour on a Saturday night, and spend the afternoon of the Sunday in driving in the parks. They were glaring defects, which openly met her eye, and put a stop to any wish to inquire further. Neither was there any fear that the external circumstances of religion would make an impression upon her at Henningsley. Father Andrea, even before he came there, was well acquainted with the state of the parish of Deering. The Countess, so soon affected by all that appealed to the eye, would only be disgusted by the neglected churchyard, and perhaps moved to ridicule by the unsightly building. If she went amongst her tenants, she would hear little or nothing of the labours of the clergyman. He would be spoken of as a good-natured, well-meaning, indolent man; but Beatrice would know that these were not the qualities for which alone a minister of Christ ought to be distinguished. She would require zeal and devotedness; and at Deering they were not to be found. With such a low standard in the clergyman, it was not likely that there should be anything very superior in his flock. Father Andrea was aware that the imagination of the Countess was easily captivated by an accordance in taste; and to this he attributed her sudden prepossession. It could do her no harm, he thought; it might even amuse and render her happy, whilst business detained her in the country: and it would serve to relieve the burdensome weight of Lucia's ill-humour. Perhaps, indeed, it might excite jealousy, but the case could scarcely be worse than it already was; and there was one consideration which made any risk of individual happiness of very slight importance.

Father Andrea did not often indulge in visions, but he had come to England in the belief that the general state of religious feeling was opening the way for the restoration of the Romish faith. The present might be an opportunity for the furtherance

of this object: and to be the instrument of bringing within the fold of the Church, one whom he deemed a lost sheep, was a hope so animating, that, casting away his papers, he paced his little study; and, with brows bent in thought, pictured to himself the progress of events in the succeeding months, until the moment when Margaret Percival, and, it might be others with her, should be convinced of the errors of their creed, and be received as humble and believing converts into the bosom of the Romish Church.

CHAPTER XXI.

How strange is it, even to our blinded eyes, to watch the successive steps by which events desired, but believed to be improbable, are frequently brought to pass! Margaret could not be insensible to the fact that an opening was now offered, though from a cause which she herself could never have supposed possible, by which the acquaintance she had so coveted was placed within her reach. The kindness of the Countess's manner at parting she attributed solely to a wish to atone for an apparent rudeness; but, from whatever motive it arose, its effect would probably be to put her at her ease, and perhaps even to afford her occasions of intimacy which otherwise would not have been in her power. Margaret felt only delight at the prospect, forgetting her uncle's caution as to the difference of rank, and being captivated by the Countess's grace and loveliness, the simplicity mingled with enthusiasm of her conversation, and the sincerity and earnestness which had been so evident when they had approached the subject of religion. Margaret realised too little the claims of her Church to resent deeply observations which she knew to be well founded; and she was rather drawn towards the Countess than the contrary, from the circumstance of her being a Romanist. She had never known one before, and there was a romance connected with the wonderful power and splendid ceremonial of the Romish Church, which attracted her imagination, so as to leave little room for the exercise of judgment. But Margaret kept all her feelings carefully hidden. They would have found little congenial to them in the spirit which now pervaded her home. Each day brought its appointed important business for every one. Mrs. Percival at least said so. She would allow none to be idle. Something was always to be done, or to be ordered to be left undone: even the

children, in the intervals of school hours, were occupied by messages and counter messages. Agatha's wedding-dresses were ordered from Paris and London; but there were the unnumbered *et ceteras* of a bridal *trousseau*, requiring a perfect taste and a vigilant eye, besides the discussions as to the guests to be invited to the breakfast, and the preparations for a dance in the evening. The general remark about weddings is that they are very dull; but Mrs. Percival was resolved this should not be said of Agatha's, and when her husband hinted a little attention to economy, he was silenced by the reproof: "Really, my dear Dr. Percival, I don't understand you,—this is quite a new trait in your character! When your daughter is going to marry a man of fortune like Colonel Clive, to object to an entertainment on her wedding day! what would the world think if it were to be known?"

"That I was a very sensible man, and fond of quiet," murmured Dr. Percival; but it was not the day for murmurs: "the world" won the victory, and the invitations were sent. Margaret's taste went against this, as against very many other of the great preparations; and she wondered that her mother did not agree with her. Mrs. Percival was not in general a woman of pretension, and for another person she would have decided at once, that the style in which the lady had been accustomed to live, and not the wealth of the gentleman whom she was to marry, should regulate the entertainments; but we cannot always keep a check upon the betrayal of our secret principles, and in the bustle of so grand an event, Mrs. Percival displayed much which in more sober moments she would have been the first to conceal. The dance was to be; and besides, a large breakfast; to which were to be asked all Colonel Clive's relations, all Agatha's who were within any convenient distance, and as many intimate friends of both as would be offended at being omitted. The accommodation of so many in a house of moderate dimensions like the Grove would have puzzled less experienced heads; but upon all such questions Mrs. Percival was in her element. She knew exactly how to place tables lengthways and across, how to arrange for the servants to be stationed at proper intervals to avoid confusion: she had a closed door opened, in order to afford a quicker communication between the offices and the dining-room, for that one day alone; and especially, she had prepared a list of under waiters, charwomen, and carpenter's men out of employ, who, for a mere trifle, were to assist in disposing of the remains of the breakfast, and to put everything in order for the evening. These were the real difficulties; the breakfast itself required only to be ordered,

and it was sure to be ready in proper time. Mrs. Percival's servants were too well trained to be wanting on such an occasion; and the spirit of the mistress of the house had so pervaded the whole establishment that no complaint was heard. For Miss Percival's wedding it was made a point of honour that all should exert themselves to the utmost. Margaret looked on in silence, and much thought. Agatha was now more separated from her than ever, yet Margaret could occasionally read in her wandering eye and flushed cheek the signs of a spirit but ill at ease. But it was occasionally only. None who heard Agatha Percival's clear laugh, or listened to the rich tones of her voice when she sang for the amusement of her friends, or joined with life and eagerness in the light topics of conversation, could have suspected that beneath that smooth surface of easy gaiety there lay concealed a gnawing regret and self-reproach,—kept under, indeed, by a strong hand, and most frequently lulled to repose by the flatteries which surrounded her, yet awakening at times to warn her of its existence, and to whisper to her of those future years of married life upon which she was about to enter, when the delusions of the present hour would be past away, and nothing would remain to drive from her the conviction that she had sacrificed every better feeling of her heart upon the altar of Mammon. Agatha was not happy, and she knew that her sister saw it. Margaret's had been the one voice which alone had blamed her conduct, and Margaret's was now the only countenance which did not smile with hope upon her prospects. Silence was a reproach whenever they met, and yet silence was the only refuge. What could have been said which would not have been either offensive to the one, or against the conscience of the other! As the wedding day approached, Margaret softened.— She had been angry with Agatha when it seemed possible to retract, but every day made this a more difficult step; and when Margaret once began to imagine that her sister repented of her hastiness, and would fain put an end to the engagement, resentment was changed into pity. The idea, though, was as yet only the creation of her own mind. Agatha had said nothing to give the least hint of it, and Margaret only judged by the downcast look, and the change of voice, noticed by herself alone, whenever Colonel Clive appeared, and which were followed almost immediately by bursts of gaiety. Something, too, she suspected from the way in which Agatha received the Colonel's valuable presents. Her manner was almost repulsive for the first few moments, and afterwards there was no expression of satisfaction at the tokens of affection,

but rather an undue admiration of the gifts themselves, whilst she seldom listened to any praises of his kindness, without turning attention to some other subject. And there was no bashfulness in this; Agatha's impassiveness was to the common eye what it had ever been. She spoke of her marriage quietly, as a matter of business; talked over the necessary settlements with her father; and the arrangements of her household with her mother, in as undisturbed a tone as if she were acting for another person; only when affection was alluded to, she seemed to shrink from the mention of it. Margaret blamed herself that such a state of feeling should exist between them as to render Agatha unapproachable. But there was a proud determination in her sister's character which would have made any interference probably fatal. The mere hint that she had been in error might induce Agatha to persist in it. Margaret could say nothing; but she exerted herself to the best of her ability to win her sister's confidence by kindness. All Agatha's wishes were attended to, and all her wants provided for. Margaret was ever ready to give an opinion, or deliver a message, or prevent her from seeing persons whom she disliked. She shielded her from Mrs. Percival's scrutiny and maternal lectures upon housekeeping. She wrote notes for the characters of her servants, and even undertook to make personal inquiries concerning them. Everything that right principle could suggest was done, with the faint hope, in Margaret's mind, that even at the very last moment Agatha might confess her mistake, and afford her an opportunity of entreating her to break off the engagement. Agatha's strength of mind would, she thought, support her through the ordeal which must follow upon such a step. Painful and humiliating it must of necessity be; exposing her to the observation, and even censure and ridicule, of the world; yet better, ten thousand times better any shame to herself, or even suffering to Colonel Clive, than the sin, it could not be called less, of vowing in the sight of God a love which she did not and could not expect to feel. But Margaret miscalculated, as she now frequently did when reasoning upon the movements of a worldly disposition, and judging them by her own. Strength of mind we see every day: the ambitious, the covetous, the selfish, the miserly evince it. It is often wonderful, almost to a miracle; for they toil and suffer, "they rise early, and late take rest, and eat the bread of carefulness:" they seem born to endurance and exertion; but it is the strength of an evil nature, the strength by which Satan rebelled against God. For the world they will fight, and for the world they will conquer; but let them once be required

to exercise that same power against it, and they are helpless. Agatha Percival could risk—could almost certainly give up—the happiness of her life, to excite the envy and applause of her fellow-beings; but their scorn could not be endured for a single day. Margaret saw no prospect of attaining her end, and when the day preceding the wedding arrived, she resolved not to think of it. Yet there were several trifling incidents to convince her of the truth which she strove to forget, that Agatha was rushing wilfully into misery, and that the misery had already begun. These symptoms were either not remarked by the family, or considered perfectly natural. Mrs. Percival said she had cried very much at her wedding, and no one could wonder if Agatha looked grave at the prospect of hers. The children knew that their sister was going from them to another home, and they supposed it a necessary consequence that she should wish to give them some parting remembrances, though she could not bring herself to write her name, as they said, for the last time; and the sudden tremor with which she was seized, when Colonel Clive, in the evening, alluded rather suddenly, and at a *mal-à-propos* moment, to the event of the following day, was attributed to over exertion. Margaret read it differently. It was mental, not physical, distress.—She followed her sister out of the room, though Agatha motioned her away.

"I must come, Agatha, dearest: it would be cruel to deny me to-night."

Agatha left the door of her chamber open, and casting herself upon her bed burst into tears. Margaret kissed her tenderly; but no question was asked, and no answer was required. Both knew what the other would have said. Agatha was the first to rouse herself: she sat upright, and said, with a ghastly smile, "I am not ill; tell them so, Margaret, and leave me now."

"Not ill in body," replied Margaret, with a desperate resolution to discover, at all hazards, her sister's true state; "but you are ill in mind."

There was a hollow laugh which fell discordantly upon Margaret's ear.

"You cannot possibly understand it, Margaret."

"Heaven forbid I ever should," said Margaret, solemnly.

"Then why trouble yourself? pray leave me. Mamma will be anxious."

"And not Colonel Clive?" said Margaret, whilst she looked steadfastly at her sister.

Agatha turned aside her head, and answered, "Yes, Colone

Clive too. Say to him I am better: perhaps I may come down again."

Agatha gently put her sister's hand away, and was going to rise.

"Oh! Agatha, if you love me, do not deceive me," exclaimed Margaret, her impatience becoming more and more painful.

"Deceive you? No. What are you speaking of? I am very well, and if you will go down, I shall follow you almost directly."

Margaret knew the source from which this sudden calmness originated, and her last hope died within her. The ice was once more gathering around Agatha's heart, and to reach it would soon be impossible. Yet if she did not then make the endeavour, self-reproach for years might be upon her conscience.

"Dear Agatha," she said, "you know I have never spoken my real mind since that wretched evening at Rouen, when you said you had decided for your own happiness. I know I ought not to interfere. Things are altered now. Misery is before you;—I am convinced that you feel it."

Margaret's words were uttered abruptly, but the tone of real affection could not be misunderstood. Agatha sank back upon the pillow, and her eyes closed. They were dimmed with tears when she again opened them, but in those few moments the strength of mind on which Margaret had calculated was summoned to the support of her natural pride.

"It is not too late," continued Margaret; "only say the word;—leave it to me, and I will bear, and do everything. And it is right: think of to-morrow and the vow."

Agatha slightly shuddered.

"The fearful vow, if it is not sincere; to bind you for your whole life! Agatha, in pity to yourself and to Colonel Clive, confess you have done wrong."

"Impossible! impossible!" exclaimed Agatha, impatiently; and she stood up and took the bell-rope in her hand, to summon her maid, in order, as she said, to have her dress re-arranged. Margaret stopped her, saying, "I must force you to listen to me."

Agatha leant against the wall, and waited quietly.

"There is hope to-night," pursued Margaret; "at this time to-morrow there will be none. You will see then what you have done; or if it is not so dreadful at first, it will come to you afterwards. When you are once used to all the riches and flatteries, you will hate yourself, and loathe your husband; and his love will go from you, because he will see that you do not return it; and there will be a long life before you to be spent without affection and without self-respect."

"And if I draw back," interrupted Agatha in a proud tone.

"Oh! Agatha, if you would not speak so!" exclaimed Margaret, mournfully; "I know there is nothing to be said when you have that manner."

"No, dear Margaret, indeed there is not."

Agatha's voice had seldom been so emphatic, and Margaret despaired.

"You are under a mistake," continued Agatha; "I must judge for myself."

"But Agatha, answer me one question, only one. If it could be done honourably, without exciting observation?"

"What! has Colonel Clive said anything?" inquired Agatha, with eagerness.

"No, no; of course not. But do you wish it? Would you retract if you could?"

The veins in Agatha's forehead worked quickly, and an ashy hue was on her cheek. A pause followed, and then slowly and distinctly, came the words:—

"No. I would not."

Margaret stood for an instant motionless in the centre of the room. Agatha again went to the bell, and this time no hand was stretched out to stop her.

"May you never live to repent your words, dear, dear Agatha;" was all that Margaret could say.

She had reached the door when Agatha followed her.

"Kiss me once more, Margaret; no one loves me so well!"

Margaret's arm was thrown round her sister's neck; but when she looked at Agatha with an appealing glance, which prayed that she would recall her decision, the chill impenetrability triumphed over the momentary weakness. The door was opened, Margaret went down stairs, and the bolt within the chamber was drawn. Agatha forbade admittance even to the maid whom she had summoned; and after sending a message of excuse to Colonel Clive, set herself, with an energy worthy of a better cause, to subdue the rebellious feelings which were on the point of destroying her fabric of worldly grandeur.

Many times afterwards, as Margaret recalled what she had said on that evening, she blamed herself for coldness, awkwardness, and want of tact; and certainly, if the wisdom of our efforts is to be judged by their results, hers had been ill advised. But it is useless to calculate beforehand what we shall or shall not say under certain circumstances. Words fail us when we would be most impressive; or, from our ignorance of the mind with which

we have to deal, we strike upon some unknown chord, and produce just the contrary effect to that which we had intended. We can but act upon a general principle, and guard against wilful indiscretion; and when this is done, we must commit our cause in faith to the guidance of a higher power. It might have been difficult to tell what arguments could be found most likely to touch Agatha's heart. None, perhaps, but those which would have convinced her that she would gain more respect if she drew back than if she went on. And even then there would still have remained the temptation to sacrifice inward happiness for the sake of outward splendour.

It was with this that Agatha now strengthened herself to meet the morrow's trial. She looked at her dresses and her ornaments; she pictured the beauty of Ashington, she imagined herself acting as its mistress. These were attractions which every one could appreciate, and as for her peace of mind, Agatha believed that she knew herself better than Margaret. The pain she was enduring could not, she thought, last. Repugnance would melt into indifference, and when this was attained, she would have the full enjoyment of her wishes. To sacrifice all, at the last moment, merely because she was too weak to conquer a distaste, however great, would be worse than folly. Agatha reasoned correctly. If but another object had been placed before her, no higher wisdom could be found than that which would induce her to sacrifice the comfort of the present for the lasting blessings of the future. Alas! for the miserable perversion of the highest faculty of our nature, which can thus argue for our destruction, while it is utterly powerless for our salvation!

A bridal morning! It has been the theme of poets, and the termination of the labours of novelists. Every one knows that it is full of bustle and fatigue, and ushered in, if not by open grief, at least by many secret sighs. Yet every one persists in assisting the general deception. A mother's tears must not be mentioned, and a sister's heavy heart must of necessity be forgotten. A wedding is not a selfish thing, for all private suffering is merged in the happiness of the two individuals, who are at length supposed to have attained the summit of earthly happiness.

Margaret felt that her contribution to the gaiety demanded by custom need not be a very large one. Never could there have been a marriage productive outwardly of less family distress. It was wonderful to persons experienced in such days of trial to witness the general hilarity. Earliest, and happiest, and proudest of all, was Mrs. Percival: ordering, arranging, inquiring, repeat-

ing directions again and again, sending for Margaret, and offering to help Agatha. If the weight of the world had been upon her shoulders she would, on that morning, have appeared able to endure it easily. Her only regrets were that Craven had not been able to obtain leave of absence, and that George could not be summoned from Eton; but these two facts had been known long enough to destroy any deep disappointment. There was sunshine to add to the pervading exhilaration; a bright, cloudless sunshine, heralding, as Miss Debrett, with a sudden poetical inspiration, remarked to Margaret, when they met before going to church, long years of happiness to the young couple. Margaret had been practising cheerfulness ever since she awoke at five o'clock in the morning, and a smile came as a matter of course.

"But, my dear, we are late, aren't we?" added Miss Debrett. "Nine o'clock, I declare; and the Colonel to be here at half-past. Do just let me go and see if I can't help Agatha."

"Thank you; no, indeed, you must not," said Margaret, stopping her.

"Well, perhaps it is better not; she is nervous I dare say; but do make me of use; I came early on purpose. Can I get the favours ready?"

"No, you are very kind; but there really is nothing to do. Mamma has provided everything."

"No doubt; never was any one like her. My dear Margaret, I hope Agatha may only be half as happy in married life as she is."

Margaret tried to obtain a release, for Miss Debrett's hopes always contrived to centre on the very points which were least likely to be attained.

"And have you seen Agatha yet, my dear? how does she look?"

"I went to her door," replied Margaret, "but it was fastened. She does not like to have any one with her except Baker."

"So much the better. We shall only be the more struck presently. Do you know, I hear the Colonel boasts he shall have the most beautiful wife in England."

Margaret's uncivil thoughts were not expressed. She remembered happily that the children were not quite ready. Harriet and Grace were to be amongst the four bridesmaids. Margaret, and one of Agatha's intimate acquaintances—friends she had none — were to be the others. Miss Debrett, left solitary, occupied herself in placing chairs, and smoothing cushions, and arranging ornaments. The guests were to meet in the drawing-room, and they were expected every instant. Mrs. Percival looked into the

room occasionally to see whether any one had come, and to report progress.

"Agatha was nearly ready," she said, "and so happy; quiet, perfectly quiet, but that was like her good sense: she had just been into her."

Mrs. Percival was gone before she was answered; and then again her head appeared.

"Would Miss Debrett tell Margaret to tell Symonds to count the chairs in the dining-room?"

And again. "Symonds had better tell Downing to bring the carriage five minutes earlier than the time mentioned." Once more. "Had Miss Debrett seen Mr. Sutherland?"

Miss Debrett had not; but Margaret had. She remarked him walking in the garden, and ran down, forgetful of the risk of soiling her delicate dress, to take one turn with him, and say, what she was not able to say when he arrived late the evening before, that his presence was the only comfort she could look to during the day.

"I may be sad to you," she added, "and it is a relief, — oh, so great!"

"We must look at things hopefully even now," replied Mr. Sutherland. "Our errors are punished, and Agatha's, as far as we can judge, must and will be; but then comes the working out of good from the real evil."

"And at what a fearful cost!"

"Yes; there are some faults which must be almost burnt out —vanity and worldliness. Scarcely anything else seems to reach them."

"You are no comforter," exclaimed Margaret, sorrowfully, and a tear stood in her eye.

"Forgive me," said Mr. Sutherland; "I believe it was wrong in me; at any rate, it was not what you required. But, Margaret, I will tell you something, not pleasanter, but more likely to rouse you to exertion and endurance, and so to do you good, than my hard-hearted hopes. Every prospect of happiness for Agatha, and for your whole family, depends now, as far as we are permitted to see, upon you."

"Strange consolation for a wedding morning."

"Yes; but think of it. Many minds are crushed by responsibility; but yours will not be."

There are some observations dropped in the course of casual conversation which we feel at the moment will leave an impression uneffaced and uneffaceable upon the whole of our subsequent life.

Mr. Sutherland's remark was of this nature. It gave Margaret, as he had expected it would, a sense of dignity, and strengthened her to bear whatever might be before her.

She hastened to her sister's room; Agatha was dressed, and looking lovely, almost faultlessly beautiful. Baker, standing by her, was arranging the veil, which hung in transparent folds over her soft glossy hair and simple white dress, the only ornament of which was the pearl brooch that fastened a small piece of orange flowers. Margaret's glance of eager admiration was a relief to Agatha's mind.

"If I might have helped you, dearest," said Margaret, "I should have been so glad. I hoped I might."

"Thank you, love; but I did not want it. I am not hurried. Is any one here?"

Margaret was silent from surprise. That quiet unconcerned voice and manner; could it possibly be feigned? She looked again. A marble statue could not have given less signs of feeling than Agatha. Mrs. Percival knocked at the door.

"Agatha, my darling child, you must be quick; the Colonel is arrived."

A slight alteration was visible in Agatha's clear complexion; the bright colour faded to a paler hue.

"Baker, this brooch is put in horribly; it must be lower down."

Baker objected, and Margaret was asked for an opinion.

"Margaret," said Mrs. Percival coming into the room, "you had better go; you are wanted in the drawing-room." Margaret approached her sister, and, putting aside her veil, whispered as she gave her a parting kiss, "Agatha, dearest, we must be sisters always."

Agatha's lip quivered, and when Margaret moved away, a tear was resting on her cheek. It was the last external symptom of the lingering weakness of her better nature.

A short hour afterwards and the irrevocable act was sealed. Margaret had stood beside the altar amidst the crowd of interested and curious gazers! she had heard the whispered words of admiration, and watched her sister's unhesitating step, as leaning on her father's arm, she advanced slowly up the aisle. She had noticed the trembling hand which caught the rail for support as Agatha knelt by the side of Colonel Clive, and the self-command which seemed, as by a stern will, to subdue the passing emotion. All this Margaret had seen and marvelled at the firmness of a worldly mind. But there was one marvel beyond all

others. An awful charge was given. It spoke of that dreadful day when the secrets of all hearts shall be disclosed, and called for a confession of any known impediment which should lawfully prevent the marriage. Margaret involuntarily stretched out her hand to uphold her sister, but Agatha needed no help. Those were not the words to touch a spirit incased in frivolous vanities. No movement of vein or muscle betrayed the secret of internal agitation. Calmly and audibly she pronounced the words which were to link her fate for life with a man whom in her heart she despised; and when the service was ended no smile could be seen more placid, and no expression more tranquil, than that which rested on the countenance of Agatha Clive.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE ball-room was deserted, the guests were gone; servants were busied in extinguishing the lamps; Mrs. Percival, indefatigable to the latest moment, was walking slowly round the room to pick up any stray brooches, fans, or handkerchiefs, and guard them for their rightful owners. Mr. Sutherland leant against the mantelpiece. Dr. Percival sat uneasily in an elbowless chair, and snored loudly; and Margaret looked sad, and wondered why she felt so lonely.

"Bed-time, isn't it?" asked Dr. Percival, turning himself, and rubbing his eyes.

"Three o'clock, just," said Mr. Sutherland, taking out his watch.

"Three what? twelve, you mean."

"No, exactly three—look."

Dr. Percival's drooping eyelids were not equal to the effort; he did manage to rouse himself, however, and, pushing away his chair, muttered a command that every one should go to bed directly.

"Yes, my dear, certainly; but I must see that things are a little in order first."

From Mrs. Percival's voice it might have been imagined that three in the afternoon and not three in the morning was the hour. When Dr. Percival was gone, she addressed her brother.

"Now, Henry, confess that it has been a most successful affair."

"Brilliant; but I shall appreciate it better after a night's rest."

"Why did you stay up?" said Margaret, kindly; "you were of no use."

"Thank you for the compliment; but I don't think you know how many people I managed to entertain in the course of the evening."

"And you were of great use in the morning, my dear Henry," said Mrs. Percival; "you helped us off at breakfast immensely. I really thought at one time we were going to be dull."

"Nothing new at a wedding," replied Mr. Sutherland.

"No, not at many; but this one was different. I don't see what any of us had to make us dull. It is not like a daughter's going away to India; and then such prospects! By the by, did not you think the Colonel looked extremely well?"

"He ought to have done so, to be in the least bearable by the side of poor Agatha," said Margaret.

"My love, I must insist upon your not saying poor; it sounds as if there was something to make us dislike the marriage."

"Rich, one ought to say," replied Margaret, trying to shake off the depression of spirits, and weariness of body, which she saw were not likely to excite he mother's compassion.

"And an extremely happy thing, too," replied Mrs. Percival. "Whatever befalls us, Agatha will never want money: that is one great satisfaction."

A verse from the Psalms flashed upon Mr. Sutherland's memory. "They think that their riches shall endure for ever." But he only said, "That if worldly advantages were all, Agatha might be envied."

Mrs. Percival frequently found herself thrown back, she scarcely knew how, when talking to her brother; they might start from the same point, but they seldom came to the same conclusion. A sudden unnatural fit of talkativeness, at this most unnatural hour, had seized her, and without desiring a reply, she returned again to the breakfast; enumerated its perfections, repeated the compliments which had been paid her upon its elegance, remembered the Colonel's last words, and eulogised the taste of his new carriage. From thence she proceeded to a description of her own sensations and fatigue in the afternoon, and the necessity of over-looking her servants' preparations for the evening; ending with,

"You must allow, my dear Henry, that Symonds is a treasure. No one else would have managed as he did, to have the breakfast removed, our dinner disposed of, and the supper all laid ready in the dining-room, without the least fuss."

Mr. Sutherland assented, and if Symonds' excellencies had been less universally admitted, he was too tired to enter into an argument upon the subject.

"I suppose we may go to bed now, mamma?" said Margaret, when she saw that nothing remained to be done.

"Yes, my dear, perhaps you had better. I must go into the study and dining-room, and know that all is safe and right; but I shall not want you."

"We breakfast at what time?" said Mr. Sutherland, lighting his candle.

"The usual hour, I hope," observed Margaret. "Of all mistakes, that of upsetting two days when you are not obliged to do it, is one of the greatest."

"But nature, my dear Margaret, imperative necessity, as people call it, what is to be done with it? You must remember I am not used to these gaieties. I shall lie awake for half an hour at least with pale phantoms in white satin dancing before my eyes."

"Take your own time," said Mrs. Percival. "We shall have breakfast, at any hour, for any one who wants it."

"Thank you; you are kinder than Margaret; I shall never go and see her when she has a home of her own, if she is so unmerciful."

"But," said Mrs. Percival, opening her reticule, "if you really mean to be up so early, Margaret, I may as well give you this note, and then you can send an answer the first thing. I forgot it till just now."

"For me, mamma?"

"Yes, my dear, from Henningsley. Symonds told me that one of the foreign servants brought it and said something about its being intended to be given to-morrow, but he thought he might as well take it, as he was coming this way. Those people are so stupid."

Mr. Sutherland stopped as he was going to leave the room.

"Only to ask me to lend a book," said Margaret, glancing her eye over the contents. "I will see about it in the morning. Good night, dear mamma."

Mrs. Percival was too busy and at length too wearied to be curious. She hurried away to complete her round of inspection.

Mr. Sutherland laughed, and said that "It was very soon to begin a correspondence."

"A mere matter of business," replied Margaret.

She did not offer to show him the note, and he did not ask to see it. It was indifference on his part, but on hers it was something more. Margaret rose, as she had said, at her usual hour, and the Countess's note came immediately to her remembrance. She sat down to read it again; it had given her great pleasure at

night; perhaps it would seem more formal in the morning. But no, there were the same words: an apology from the Countess for troubling her after so short an acquaintance, and a compliment, implied by the assurance that she could not have taken the liberty with any other person. Then followed the request for a volume of Alfieri, and an excuse for not having called in person, from the fear of intruding at a time when she understood that Margaret's thoughts must be otherwise engaged. And at the end came a wish for Agatha's happiness, which she trusted even a stranger might be permitted to express; and a hope that before many days had passed, she might have the pleasure of meeting Margaret again. If this note had been from any other person, Margaret would have deemed it merely kind, but considering the difference of rank, it certainly implied a more than common cordiality. She wished she had shown it to her uncle at the moment; then she would have had his opinion upon it. She could not imagine why she had not done it; now, if she said anything about it, he might fancy she was rather too much pleased, and perhaps he would say something more about unequal friendships. The same thought had really been in her mind previously, but it had been unobserved. Margaret had not the most distant idea of misleading her uncle, or keeping anything back which he ought to know. It was not in her nature to be insincere, but her intercourse with him was a voluntary one, and there was no law to insist upon her confiding to him a prepossession which he might not comprehend. And if Margaret had never consulted her uncle, and put herself, in a measure, under his guidance, her silence might have been justifiable. But when we go to a physician, we act unfairly to him and dangerously for ourselves, if we do not mention the trifling symptoms, which, perhaps, to his experience, may be the most important indications of the nature of our case. Margaret dressed quickly, put up the book, and wrote her answer, and was happy to find that the subject was not mentioned at the very late breakfast. Agatha, Colonel Clive, and the party, were topics sufficient for the conversation, not merely of that day, but of many succeeding ones.

Mr. Sutherland left the Grove immediately after breakfast, and Margaret for once did not wish him to stay. Mrs. Percival might exert her utmost energies, but she could not at will restore the tone of mind of a whole family; and the discomforts of the day after a wedding and a dance, were trying to all. Some months before, Margaret's temper might have been seriously affected by it; and most probably she would have given herself up to a day

of idleness; but on this occasion she adopted a plan different from usual. The children were not allowed a holiday, though their disinclination for lessons was set forth in glowing language. Margaret thought with them, that grammar books, and sums, and French verbs, were beyond measure uninteresting, when the spirits were suffering from re-action after over-excitement; but it was rather an argument for, than against their use. Tonics for the mind are as needful when it is unhinged as they are for the body; and bitters, every one knows, produce a very strengthening effect. Margaret administered a special dose to herself, by resisting the temptation of an easy chair, which would have given rest to her weary limbs at the risk of increasing her languor; and then proceeded to deal in the same way, though more leniently, with her pupils. Harriet asked for a holiday, and Grace declared that they quite expected it the day after Agatha's wedding.

"Agatha is enjoying herself very much, I am sure," exclaimed Philip, "so why shouldn't we?"

Margaret breathed a sigh of envy over the blessed simplicity of childhood; and then said, "that she had not promised a holiday, and she did not think it right to give one."

"Oh! why not? how unkind!" exclamed Grace and Philip at once.

"Hush!" Margaret held up her finger to enforce silence. "You both know that is not a proper way of speaking. I am the best judge of what is unkind."

Margaret looked very grave, and the children were a little ashamed. One chief excellence in Margaret's qualifications as a governess now was, that she never gave long lectures, so that there was no opportunity of tiring attention, or exciting ridicule.

"You know, Harriet," she continued, without noticing the little ones, "that if you have a holiday, I shall have one too."

"Yes, of course."

"And I shall be able to lie down on the sofa, and go to sleep, or read, or do what I like."

"Yes, I know that."

"But I don't wish to do so, because it is not right to give way when one is tired, unless one is really unwell: and I shall be much happier to rest when the lessons are over, than I should be if there were none; and so I am sure it will be with you."

"No, indeed, Margaret, indeed it won't," exclaimed Grace.

"Well, whether it will or will not, lessons we must have. Now who will bring the books first."

"But not all the lessons, excuse just a few;" said Harriet, in as coaxing a manner as she could assume.

"I will not promise that I will excuse any. We will do what we can, and then we shall be all the happier afterwards. You can't think how I am looking forward to lying down by and by."

"Your face is quite white now," remarked Philip.

"Sleepy, very sleepy, Philip," said Margaret, closing her eyes playfully; "but we are all going to be as busy as possible, so I shall be the first to bring out the books."

"No, no, not you," and Philip tried to keep her in the chair. "You go to sleep, and we will fetch them."

Margaret sat still, and the regular routine of school began. Having afforded no expectation of a holiday, or a half, or a quarter of one, Margaret was not teased with requests to be spared any particular task. The children knew what was required of them, and if Margaret did not complain, they felt that they had no right to do it. The lessons were, however, finished sooner than usual. Margaret, when the time came, excused one or two little things; dates, and multiplication tables, which were repeated nearly every day, besides asking fewer questions and giving shorter explanations, and so contrived not to overtask their minds, and yet at the same time to preserve the notion of order. The mental powers needed rest, the moral stimulus; and by this means, she hoped that she had succeeded in administering the proper medicine to both.

Margaret was really thankful at the close of the day for the necessity which had forced her to exertion. She could never have imagined beforehand the blank which the loss of Agatha would cause. It was not that they were congenial in taste, or had shared the same pursuits, or even had the same friends and interests. In all these respects they had been separated; but there was the loss of the familiar face, the sight of the empty chair, the impulse to make an observation checked by the recollection that there was no one to listen to it. Margaret had never known the fearful void of death, and perhaps for that reason she was the more sensible of the pain of this first parting, and she could not experience the consolation from which her mother so largely profited.

Mrs. Percival repeated about once in every hour that, dear Agatha must be enjoying herself thoroughly. She said it to each person who came in, and when there was no listener, repeated it for her own satisfaction. Fond as she really was of her daughter, the separation would otherwise have been a great trial. Margaret

could neither assent nor dissent; she could scarcely hope; but she had her own way of gaining comfort, and Agatha's name was mentioned with a fervent prayer for her happiness, which many would have deemed more befitting the day of adversity than of prosperity.

CHAPTER XXIII.

"Mrs. St. Aubyn!" announced the butler, throwing open the door of the drawing-room at Henningsley, and pronouncing the name so as to prevent it from being intelligible to English ears. Mrs. St. Aubyn entered, drawing the folds of her shawl gracefully around her. "I am so happy," she began; but she was stopped by a slight look of surprise, and a distant greeting from Lucia. The Countess was not present. Mrs. St. Aubyn was seldom thrown out of her ordinary self-possession by any mistake; and being informed that the Countess was walking in the grounds, and would probably return in a few minutes, she proceeded to exert her powers of entertainment for the Countess's friend. Lucia had still an air of melancholy, but it was not settled, as when she first came to Henningsley. She had fallen into a certain routine of life, and the number of visitors gave her pleasure. She enjoyed variety, and would have been open to the snares of dissipation, if they had ever been placed within her reach. Besides, the Countess was not taken away from her in the same way as she had been in London, for there were no relations to claim her attention. Neither had Margaret Percival's name been mentioned in a way to re-awaken her jealousy. Beatrice was more watchful over herself than she had been when impressed with the belief that Margaret was a Romanist, for she knew that Lucia would not at all enter into the points of character which had pleased her, and would only be startled at learning how great an effect had been produced by one whose faith was, as she deemed it, heretical. For many reasons, therefore, Lucia was more inclined for conversation, and more engaging in manner, than she had been before; and Mrs. St. Aubyn, who was easily satisfied by an attentive listening attitude, and soon discovered that Lucia was much more willing to hear than to speak English, contentedly continued the conversation, under the supposition that the Countess would in time make her appearance.

It was desultory at first, touching upon the Countess's stay in

London, and upon those of her relations with whom Mrs. St. Aubyn had a personal acquaintance. Lucia gave her opinion unreservedly, and with a little mixture of quick sarcasm, which, joined to her foreign accent, and curious modes of expression, was not unpleasing to a person whose good-nature was superficial. Mrs. St. Aubyn related a few anecdotes in return, and at last ventured upon subjects nearer home. The neighbouring families were brought forward, and Mrs. Percival was alluded to, but Lucia did not like her new friend the better upon finding how nearly she was connected with her.

Mrs. St. Aubyn spoke much in praise of the family, but there was an under current of feeling not perfectly cordial, which would have been evident to one more practised than Lucia in English character and habits of thought. For her own sake Mrs. St. Aubyn pronounced Agatha a lovely, elegant young creature, and Margaret astonishingly clever; but in her heart she was disappointed with both.

Her wish of patronising had failed: Agatha had assumed a tone of independence from the first moment of her engagement, and Margaret was not approachable by any of those ingratiating civilities which Mrs. St. Aubyn was in the habit of bestowing upon her favourites. Lucia had quickness enough to perceive that the unmarried sister, whom she supposed at once must be the Countess's acquaintance, was not considered perfect. Cleverness is like good-nature, a point always brought prominently forward, when there are others which it is desirable to keep in the background. Lucia remarked that she thought the Countess must have seen Miss Percival; she had certainly been introduced to one of Mrs. Clive's sisters.

"Yes, that must have been Margaret. She is rather what is called a taking person in society. I mean,"—perceiving Lucia's look of bewilderment,—"that she is good-looking and talks well."

Lucia did not give the Countess's opinion, though Mrs. St. Aubyn was curious to hear it. "We shall not know many people here," she said: "the Countess will stay a very little while."

"Really! how tantalising!" replied Mrs. St. Aubyn. "We had all hoped that the Countess would have fixed upon Henningsley as her residence."

"The Signora is so fond of Italy," replied Lucia.

"Yes, and it is extremely natural; but she would like this place very much if she were to remain here long enough to know

every one. Perhaps, though, the climate would not suit her: is she delicate?"

"Si, no, si," exclaimed Lucia, not liking the question. "La Signora sta bene." The sentence required to be interpreted, for Mrs. St. Aubyn had no knowledge of Italian; and Lucia, blushing, explained that the Countess was seldom ill.

"Indeed! she has rather a hectic flush; and both her parents died of consumption."

They were thoughtless words, and they caused an enduring pain. Lucia was fully aware of the fatal disease which for generations had carried off the youngest and fairest of the house of de Lisle; but in her devotion to the Countess she had never seriously entertained the idea that she could be subject to this or any other of the sufferings of mortality. Mrs. St. Aubyn marked the glistening eye of the excitable Italian girl, and was hurt at the distress which she had so unintentionally occasioned. Her manner softened into sympathy, and Lucia was touched by it. Kindness in any shape soon found entrance to her heart, and in this instance it was united to a hearty appreciation of the one object of her affection. Mrs. St. Aubyn admired, as Lucia believed the Countess ought to be admired, without qualification; and in her enthusiasm she overlooked her connection with Margaret Percival, and thought only of the similarity of taste. Mrs. St. Aubyn on her part was struck by the originality of her new acquaintance. It was long since she had met with any person so calculated to arouse attention from her peculiarities. The curious style of dress, the foreign manner, and the strange accent, were all in their way interesting; and Mrs. St. Aubyn was strongly inclined to believe that, for the time being, Lucia might supply the place of her former favourite, Agatha.

"Is the Countess quite resolved never to go out?" she said, wishing to try how far Lucia was independent.

"Quite, whilst we are here. She went out in London."

"But you must wish for society, and you have none."

"We see the people when they call," was the reply.

"That is not the sort of thing I mean; it is not society."

"I have no wish for more," said Lucia.

"But that can scarcely be at your age; in a new country."

"Mi piace—it is very well," replied Lucia.

Mrs. St. Aubyn was going to reason against any such ignoble contentment, when the Countess appeared. Lucia looked at her with an uneasiness which she had never known before. There was a little colour on her cheek when she came in, but it soon

faded away, and she seemed fatigued. This Lucia persuaded herself was very natural, for Beatrice had been giving orders for some alterations in the grounds, and had been walking and standing about; but Mrs. St. Aubyn noticed the same varying complexion, and with a less interested eye perceived in it the symptoms of an inherent delicacy of constitution. Lucia's face was lighted up with satisfaction when she no longer was obliged to take the first part in the conversation. She was not shy, but it was difficult as yet to converse fluently in a new language, and she was sensitively alive to the ridicule which she had understood the English were accustomed to bestow upon foreigners. There was nothing, however, in Mrs. St. Aubyn's manner to excite this dread; and Lucia, to her own surprise, found that under the shadow of the Countess's protection, her English phrases came comparatively without difficulty. They were but trifles which induced her to look favourably upon Mrs. St. Aubyn, but Lucia felt at ease with her; and when, as they parted, another regret was expressed that they had declined all society, she was not sorry to hear the Countess modify the declaration, and say, that although she had considered retirement desirable for herself, it might be less advantageous for Lucia, and she should be sorry to be a check upon her pleasure. Mrs. St. Aubyn was pleased at the opening; for she did not dislike the idea of perhaps chaperoning the young Italian, the friend of the Countess Novera; and, as an earnest of future kindness, she pressed Lucia's hand warmly at parting, and good-naturedly wished that it might be in her power to assist in making her stay in the neighbourhood agreeable.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THERE were many conflicting feelings in Margaret's breast during the first week which followed her sister's marriage. Interest for Agatha, and wishes for her own improvement, were often present; but with all other thoughts came some remembrance of the Countess Novera.

And there was nothing unnatural, scarcely enthusiastic, in this. The Countess returned Mrs. Percival's visit, and the charms of her society lost nothing by repetition. The ordinary conversation which passed gave rise to opinions upon books, and, as a necessary consequence, followed little interchanges of civility; volumes

lent and returned, and notes written to accompany them; excuses for delay, and petitions for more; and, at last, a request that Margaret would call at Henningsley whenever she walked in that direction. No one could fairly have objected to the intimacy at any particular stage, or have said that it was injudicious in the Countess, or dangerous for Margaret, for the advances were scarcely perceptible. Even Mrs. Percival did not understand more than that the Countess liked to speak Italian, and had discovered that Margaret knew the language. This was all which Margaret herself said, for she disliked the idea of making much of an acquaintance which was only in its germ; and the tone in which her mother sometimes prophesied half in jest, and half in earnest, that she would in time be the Countess's friend, offended her taste. The question whether she was entering upon a safe path did not offer itself to Margaret's mind. She did not know that she was entering upon any path. Every incident which added to her knowledge of the Countess's character, was in itself trifling; and at the end of a month she could not have said, with truth, that they were well acquainted. Yet Margaret was unsuspiciously yielding herself to a new influence. The thought which wakes with us in the morning, and follows us to our rest at night, and obtrudes itself in the intervals of business and amusement, cannot be without its effect. In days gone by this thought had been the longing for an unreal world: now, it was the remembrance of an earthly being. What the Countess had said or thought; what were the opinions which she had brought forward; what was the probability of their meeting;—these were now the subjects of most frequent recurrence, subdued indeed and mastered by the higher principle which actuated Margaret's life, but seldom or never banished. One thing might have given rise to a suspicion that all was not right. This interest alone was not shared by Mr. Sutherland. The first reserve was now increasing, though Margaret never tasked herself to discover why. She mentioned the facts, but she offered no comment upon them; and the facts themselves were not worth consideration. Nothing was passing, to Mr. Sutherland's knowledge, which was not required by common civility; and it was not to be supposed that Margaret, who was unreserved with him upon all other subjects, should withhold this one.

Beatrice in the meanwhile was associating herself with Margaret as constantly, but in a very different spirit. Hers was, as Father Andrea had foreseen, the governing mind. Age, and rank, and knowledge of the world were on her side, and her soul was born to command. In childhood she had ruled with undisturbed

sway over her father and her father's household; in love, she had exacted the most devoted tenderness; in marriage, she had been happy, because, joined to respect for her husband's character, she knew that she was entirely mistress of his every thought; and in friendship, she desired an affection the same in kind, though it must of necessity be less in degree. Only in religion could she be humble; and religion interposed no obstacle to her intercourse with Margaret Percival. Father Andrea's observant eye took cognisance of all that passed before it, and in his character of confessor he gained an insight into facts and feelings which would in themselves necessarily have been concealed. His ulterior views were not displayed, for Beatrice was not as yet possessed by the spirit of proselytism; and if the idea were unguardedly presented to her, she would be likely to commence the attack openly; in which case it would be almost certain to fail. The prejudices of a Protestant would be shocked, and Margaret would either herself break off the acquaintance, or her family would insist upon its being stopped. Father Andrea was by nature cautious, and the habits of his religious education had made him more so. The first thing to be gained was Margaret's heart, and this he could perceive was fast yielding to the Countess. They had spent several afternoons together, not by appointment, but from the wish to prolong an agreeable visit, and Father Andrea had occasionally been with them. Perhaps he came into the room in search of a book; or he had been found there when Margaret called; or he was going out, and had some question to ask previously. Some reason was always at hand, and the Countess was so used to his presence that she never allowed it to disturb the conversation or the employment of the hour. Margaret felt a little awkward at first, for her awe of a Romish priest was great; but Father Andrea, upon nearer observation, gave her the impression of being entirely abstracted. He asked his question of the Countess, and bowed to her, and perhaps inquired after her family; but he seldom did more; and if he remained in the room he took up a book, and scarcely ever raised his eyes from its pages. Margaret had no self-important ideas, and believing herself insignificant in every way, could not wonder that the Romish confessor did not think it worth while to converse with her. When she thought this, Margaret knew but little of the windings of the human heart. Father Andrea sat with his elbow leaning on the arm-chair, his head resting on his hand, and his eyes riveted on the volume before him; but the words which met his view did not gain an entrance into his mind. It was the ear which was opened, and through

that channel came the knowledge which was to enable him to work, as he believed, for the salvation of a misguided girl. He had never yet ventured upon any observation which might betray his consciousness of what was said either by Beatrice or Margaret, though there was much to interest a cultivated and high-toned mind. The Countess was but partially acquainted with English literature, and in her desire to profit by the present season of leisure she had commenced a course of study with the energy which was so strong an ingredient in her character. Margaret was her counsellor, and occasionally her instructor. She would throw light upon some abstruse passage in Shakspeare; or bring her knowledge of history to support a contested point; or give a slight sketch of a distinguished character alluded to in the course of a discussion. From the necessity of instructing the children, all these things were familiar to her; and the Countess's rapid mind delighted in gaining information without the trouble of searching for it. Father Andrea heard, and often wondered. His task appeared a more difficult one than he had imagined; for he saw that Margaret was something more than poetical and enthusiastic; she was well-informed, and had been accustomed to read and think much. Yet her information was not of a kind likely to be really an obstacle to his wishes. It embraced a large circle; so he perceived, from the ease with which she pursued the most widely different topics; but the history of the Church did not apparently form a part of it. Religion was naturally kept mostly in the back-ground; still, occasionally it was touched upon, and Margaret glided over it, and went on fluently, and without distrust. Everything was taken for granted. Her faith in the English Church was based upon habit, early prejudice, a belief that what was established must, of necessity, be right. This the confessor conjectured soon after his first introduction to her. She conceded, without difficulty, the title of Catholic; talked of the Established Church of England and the Established Church of Scotland in the same terms; she even once spoke of a person, whose name was casually mentioned, as an Unitarian clergyman. This was merely custom, for Margaret did actually know that a difference existed, but it was seldom brought prominently forward, and scarcely ever acted upon; and it is only by action that our belief, of whatever kind, is matured so as really to deserve the name.

Margaret would indeed have been surprised if she had known how her character had been examined and understood in the course of the few hours which had been spent in the presence of

Father Andrea: for, taken together, they were but few, and when they were over she could only say that they had been spent agreeably; that the Countess was a very charming person. There was nothing beyond; no expression of affection, nor of peculiar interest. It was outwardly but the ordinary intimacy which springs up between minds of a similar cast, and which, after forming the amusement and solace of a few weeks, is often destroyed by circumstances, and perhaps never renewed again. If it had been more, Margaret's conscience might have been alarmed; she might have asked whether her uncle would approve, and have reproached herself for insincerity; but the feelings which were latent in her own breast, and gathering strength at each interview, required some expressions from the Countess to call them into active existence. Besides, Margaret had in her own heart a testimony that nothing had as yet done her harm. Day by day she awoke to her duties, humble and sincere; and day by day those duties were more carefully performed. Her position in the family was materially altered, and Mr. Sutherland's warning of the extent to which the happiness of all depended upon her, was continually brought to mind. Mrs. Percival indeed still talked much of Agatha, the day when she was to return, and the gaieties which were to follow; but her real happiness was derived from Margaret. She confessed herself that it was strange how quickly Agatha's place had been filled up. "Every one must miss her, dear child, extremely; but, somehow, Margaret was so clever, she managed to make things go on just as well. It really seemed as if it were a good thing for her to have so much employment, for she did not forget as she used to do."

Margaret thought this herself. There was no struggle now between her favourite occupations and her family duties. It was clear that the sacrifice must be made; she must give herself up for the general comfort. The children, visitors, notes, entertainments,—nothing could be done without her; and if strict unceasing self-denial was required, yet at the close of the day there was the great reward: she could lie down to sleep happy, not that her work had been performed well, but that it had been carried through vigorously, with a strong will and a watchful eye, and offered in gratitude to God for the mercy which had received her as His child. Margaret's seasons of enjoyment appeared likely to be fewer than ever; but, in fact, they were merely spread over a wider surface. That to which she gave her full attention was soon invested with interest, and the children especially became more and more engrossing both to her time and her affections.

Through them she frequently contrived to visit Henningsley when she could not otherwise have spared the time. It was easy to take them into the grounds, and leave them to amuse themselves under the eye of the gardener, whilst she paid her visit to the Countess; and in this way they were the means of giving her the greatest pleasure which she now experienced.

The six weeks of Agatha's absence were drawing to an end. The second visit to the Continent, which had once been proposed, was deferred to a future occasion, and the time had been spent in visits to Colonel Clive's relations in the North. If letters were to be believed, the period had been one of undisturbed serenity. Fine weather, and kind friends, and unbounded luxury, these were the constant themes. Mrs. Percival looked no farther; perhaps even if she had looked she would not have perceived; for there is a dimness of the mental vision which, from being in its origin wilful, is more incurable than any physical blindness. Margaret ran through her sister's letters, seeking for that which she never found. Colonel Clive's relations might be kind, but he himself was scarcely named. Descriptions of dinner parties, and fêtes, and beautiful scenery, filled up the pages; but no word betrayed the secret either of satisfaction or melancholy.

Agatha's letters were cheerful, — that was all which could be said of them; to Margaret they were bright and cold, as sunshine upon ice. Margaret had indulged one hope for Agatha's happiness; she had believed Colonel Clive to be really attached to her, and she had thought it possible that constant attention and consideration might by degrees inspire something of a feeling of love, — such love as Agatha required. How under the circumstances he should not have perceived Agatha's indifference was astonishing; but still cases of the kind have been known, and love on one side was at least better than on neither. There were, however, but slight traces of this love in anything which Agatha wrote. It was not often "Colonel Clive wishes," or "is anxious," or "hopes," but "Colonel Clive says we must;" and "must," though a very fitting word in a husband's mouth, is seldom brought into play at the beginning of a married life. If Agatha did not rule, even her own mistaken hopes of happiness must fall to the ground, for of all tyrannies, that of a weak intellect is the most galling. Margaret could not dare to wish; she could not pray that Agatha might be blessed according to her own view of earthly felicity; and yet it was sad to think of the suffering to which her uncle had referred as almost the only hope of purifying a vain and selfish mind.

Mrs. Percival counted with eagerness the days which must soon pass by before Agatha should be established in splendour, — the mistress of Ashington Court. Her drive was now frequently with Mrs. St. Aubyn in this direction, under the excuse of giving an order, but in reality to indulge a species of prospective greatness. "Ashington was exactly the place for Agatha," she said; — "large and lofty, and extremely elegant: nothing of the low rooms and dark windows which it was the fashion for some persons to admire." There was a beautiful Corinthian portico, and a salon filled with statues, and a long dining-room just suited for a princely entertainment, such as Colonel Clive would of course give. Then the drawing-rooms were furnished in such good taste, with hangings of the palest blue, and sofas, and chaises-longues, and every refinement of luxury in the newest fashion. Some persons had said maliciously that they gave the idea of an upholsterer's shop; but this could only be envy. Mr. Fitzhardinge, Colonel Clive's uncle, from whom he had inherited the property, was a person of acknowledged superiority in all such matters, and had newly furnished the house only six months before his death. The park too was delightful, extensive, and in beautiful order; not wooded as much as Henningsley, and more level, but containing splendid and most valuable timber, and well stocked with deer. Margaret had never cared much for Ashington; it was too modern; and the Fitzhardinges were a prosperous unromantic family, and had not been its possessors for more than sixty or seventy years. She had no regret on being told, the day before Colonel Clive and Agatha were expected, that she must not go with Mrs. St. Aubyn, as had been arranged, because Mrs. Percival had some instructions to give which had been sent in the last letter, and in that case there would be no one to walk with the children. Margaret was very willing to be put aside, and planned instead two visits, one of duty, the other of pleasure; and both she thought more likely to be agreeable in the retrospect than a drive with Mrs. St. Aubyn, and a tedious two hours at Ashington. Miss Debrett's was the duty visit. She had not been well, and was greatly dependent for amusement upon morning calls, especially from any of the family at the Grove. Agatha's letters were always read to her, and she knew better than any one else the exact days fixed by the Colonel for reaching any particular place, the length of the visit, and the time which was to elapse before they were to return home. If Agatha's marriage had been useful to no one else, certainly it had been to her. It gave her subjects for thought and conversation at all hours and in all

society; and now every little detail was seized upon, and treasured up, and recounted, in order to fill up the void in a weak fanciful mind, as well as from the real affection which made the least event of consequence when it concerned those she loved. Margaret stood at the door holding the handle of the bell; but she had not rung it, when an exclamation from one of the children stopped her: — "Craven! Craven! — yes, just look, Margaret, that is Craven, I am sure." Philip ran off, followed by Grace. Margaret looked again. She could not see distinctly, and she did not like to go forwards. A few steps more, however, brought the gentlemanly figure of a young officer more plainly into view, and she walked towards him quickly. Grace held his hand, jumping with delight at every step; and Margaret was pleased, but not quite as much so as she would once have been. Her first impression used to be of his handsome face and his open-hearted manner; they were unchanged; but Margaret had lately caught a glimpse of the world within, and she was dissatisfied.

"Well, Margaret, this is delightful," was Craven's salutation; "we must not kiss, I suppose, in the high-road?"

"Not quite," said Margaret, laughing: "we will take the kiss for granted. But, Craven, what a strange thing for you to come in this way!"

"Strange! no, not at all. I said I should get leave the first moment I could; and things are quiet now. A troop of horse, and a little mock firing, soon brought the Paddies to their senses."

"I can't help wishing they had been in their senses six weeks ago," said Margaret; "we had nothing but lamentations from mamma over your absence."

"Maternal pride, I suppose. She wanted to exhibit the perfections of her son and her son-in-law side by side. By the by, Margaret;" and Craven swung his cane with an air of would-be unconsciousness — "what is the latest intelligence from the Pyramids?"

"The Pyramids?" repeated Margaret.

"Yes; how do they bear their loss? The great Cheops, I mean, and his brother mummies. Did they send a deputation to dance at the wedding?"

"Hush! Craven," said Margaret, looking at the children; "you really should remember: connections are serious things."

"Most serious and valuable; inestimable in the present case. Agatha is a very wise girl."

"Time will prove," replied Margaret. "Grace, my dear, run on with Philip and Harriet to the next gate."

"Solon, as usual," exclaimed Craven. "If Agatha is not wise, I know who is; but when is this golden age to return?"

"To-morrow, we expect; so you are come just in time."

"Even so. I have always had a conviction that I was born under a fortunate star, and it was never stronger than at this moment. The Colonel will be fond of me, don't you think he will?"

"Really I don't know," said Margaret. "Not if you are so conceited."

"Conceited! nay, that is the last thing I am to be accused of. My only misfortune is that I am too humble. I can't push myself on in the world."

"Or rather, you try hard, and the world pushes you back."

"We won't argue the point: pushing, or not pushing, it is clear that I do not have my deserts."

"No," said Margaret, "I really do not think you do."

Craven stopped and laughed, and then assuming a graver tone, he said, "Margaret, I don't trust you: you are not my friend."

"Yes, indeed, Craven; but it is no proof of affection to encourage extravagance."

"Pretty well that for a younger sister!" exclaimed Craven, drawing up his head, proudly.

"No, it is not at all well," replied Margaret. "Younger sisters have no business to say such things; but if elder brothers will put them in a false position, and tell them their follies, what is to be done?"

"You are a good child, Margaret, I know," said Craven, "and I don't find fault: I am not come over for that purpose."

"You are come over to see us, are you not?" said Margaret, looking alarmed.

"Hem;—yes, to see you certainly."

"And for nothing else?"

"Can't exactly say that, if you put me on my word of honour. But don't frighten yourself, Margaret; things are never the better for looking at them with a black face."

"Indeed, Craven, it is very hard to look at your things, as you call them, with any other. You forget what it is to see papa worried."

"No, believe me, I don't forget. It is the very reason which induced me to come over. I never mean to worry him any more."

"Really, are you in earnest?" and Margaret's face brightened.

"Not any more till next time. Seriously though, Margaret," he added, perceiving her vexation; "I mean to get out of my

difficulties somehow. I have had thoughts lately of trying my luck amongst the Egyptians. Since Agatha has caught such a splendid specimen, why shouldn't I? What do you say to Mrs. St. Aubyn?" Margaret drew her arm away.

"Craven, this is unkind in you. If you are jesting, just tell me so at once."

"Nay, Margaret, it is you who are unkind in supposing it possible I should jest upon such a tender subject." Margaret made no answer. "Well! we won't quarrel," continued Craven, good-naturedly forcing her to take his arm again; "there's nothing so very dreadful after all; but you know I love dearly to tease you."

"We will not quarrel, certainly," replied Margaret, firmly; "but I don't pretend to say that I am satisfied. I think there is something amiss."

"Just so far amiss as there always must be when a young man enters the army with a shabby allowance," said Craven.

"But the army is your profession; it is to be your support."

"Support!" he exclaimed, ironically. "You know what the cow did, Margaret, when the old woman supported her upon a straw a day."

"Your allowance would purchase a good many straws," replied Margaret.

"Yes, straws I grant you; but who is to live upon straws? It is absurd talking. A young girl like you, just out of the school-room, can know nothing of the matter."

"Then why tell me anything about it?"

"I don't know. I was a fool, I believe, for my pains." He tossed his stick in the air and caught it again, and then calling to Philip, threatened to chase him to the next elm tree. Margaret could not help fearing that she had said something injudicious, and retaining his hand as he was about to set off in pursuit of Philip, she said:

"I wish, Craven, you would tell me if I can be of any use to you."

"You could be of the greatest; but I am sure you won't be; so I shall not trouble you."

Margaret's resentment was roused, but her habitual watchfulness checked it.

"I am sure I will be, if it is right," she said, mildly. "When will you tell me what I can do?"

"Not now, not now," he exclaimed, with impatience. The next instant he was running at full speed after Philip.

Margaret watched him as he caught the child, and held him up in derision; then putting him on the ground, he turned into a lane, and, vaulting over a gate, called out "Good bye" to Margaret, as she passed, and strode across the fields to the Grove. Margaret was vexed both with him and herself, and as it was now out of her power to visit Miss Debrett, she pursued her walk to Henningsley.

CHAPTER XXV.

"FATHER," said the Countess, addressing her confessor, and putting a letter into his hands, "I must ask your advice."

Father Andrea, who was standing by the fire, which burnt cheerfully on the bright October morning, answered her with more than usual gravity.

"Is the matter a very important one, my daughter?"

"That means you would rather defer it; but it is important so far as I must decide upon it soon; and as I expect Miss Percival in an hour's time, I should be glad to have my mind settled before she comes."

Father Andrea held out his hand for the letter.——"I will not trouble you to read it," continued the Countess. "There is very little that would interest you, except the business part. Lady Anstruther wishes me to spend the winter with her in Devonshire. Father Andrea neither moved nor spoke, and a person less accustomed to his manner would have supposed that he was giving no attention. Beatrice, however, went on: "I will read you what she says.——'We have a large house, in a most delightful climate, the best in England. If you will come you shall have rooms for yourself, and Father Andrea, and Lucia; any one, in short, whom you may choose to bring. I am more particularly anxious about it, because, after the conversation we had in London, I cannot think the bleak air of Henningsley at all suited to your constitution. You are not easily alarmed, I know; and I really see no reason to be so now; but you must remember that the place has not agreed with many of your family, and this first winter in England must of necessity be very trying.'" Beatrice put the letter upon the table, and laying her hand upon Father Andrea's arm she said, with a smile, "Now, father, advise me."

The confessor looked sadly at her beautiful face, and an expression far different from hers told the thoughts which w

working in his breast.—"Lady Anstruther is your true friend," he said.

"With regard to my health? but indeed, father, that is over anxiety. I never was better: do I look ill?" The brilliant colour and the sparkling eyes answered the question for the moment to Father Andrea's satisfaction. He was not used to watch the progress of the insidious disease of a northern climate.

"What I really wish to know," continued Beatrice, "is whether it would be right. Just as I am established here, and have made myself occupations amongst the tenantry, and when you own that you see a prospect of usefulness for yourself, is it right to go away?"

"You would go to Italy," said Father Andrea.

"I don't know; I have not thought about it lately: but if I did, that would be different, because I have claims in Italy as well as England. It would not be a question of mere choice."

"What does Lady Anstruther mean by the conversation you had in London?" inquired the confessor. "You never mentioned it to me."

"Because it was not worth while. I know you are apt to alarm yourself without cause. She told me that I resembled my mother, and then she bade me be careful."

"You should have mentioned this, my daughter; it might have caused a change in your movements."

"Oh! no;" and the Countess laughed; "it would have been too absurd, when it was the height of summer, to have been afraid of coming here. Lady Anstruther herself said it would probably do me good: she only objects for the winter."

"Then I would listen to her," said Father Andrea, gravely. "It will be safer, and your plans for good may be entrusted to other hands."

The Countess looked disappointed, and said, "There are many things which would keep me here; and I hoped you would have seen them: Lucia at length appears contented."

"Yes, but we must not depend upon her."

"It is rest for the present," said the Countess, heaving a sigh of relief. "I can never be sufficiently grateful to Mrs. St. Aubyn for giving her amusement."

"I would rather her contentment arose from a different source," replied Father Andrea; "yet I have no reason as yet to believe that it has done her harm. Her attachment to our Holy Church is unwavering."

"And it will remain so, I am certain," exclaimed Beatrice; "but

her present enjoyment is natural. Remember, father, how very young she is."

"I would not check her," he replied; "yet I may be allowed to wish that there were less of the world's leaven in her amusements."

"Time will work a change," said the Countess. "She will be grave enough even for me, father, before many years have passed over her head."

"It would be better to offer an untainted sacrifice," said the confessor. "It must be less dangerous for ourselves, and more acceptable to our God."

"Ah, father, who does offer it?" said Beatrice, in a melancholy tone, whilst a tide of self-upbraiding reflections forced themselves upon her mind.

"None as we could wish, my daughter," replied the father, mildly; "and therefore must we pray, and watch, and fast, and subdue the flesh, to obey the motions of the spirit."

"Lucia does all this," replied the Countess.

"Yes, and therefore I am not as yet afraid; but the intimacy which you think of consequence would not weigh with me, to induce me to urge your remaining here. There is another, which may be of far greater importance."

"Margaret Percival," said the Countess, and a bright colour overspread her features. "Father, you have promised to warn me when I was trusting myself too far."

"You have not done it," he said, quickly; "if the interests of an immortal soul are at stake, they are hers, not yours."

The Countess looked at him steadily, to catch the import of his words. "Do I teach her harm?" she asked with anxiety.

Father Andrea allowed a smile of pleasure, such as seldom brightened his stern features, to rest upon his lips; and as the Countess seated herself by his side, he laid his hand upon her head and said,—"The blessing of heaven be upon you, my daughter; you can never teach harm to any one. No, it was of good that I spoke—unspeakable, immeasurable. Upon you may rest the salvation of an undying spirit."

Beatrice bent her eyes humbly to the ground as she replied: "I had no such thought, father; you expect a zeal which I do not possess."

"There was no need of it hitherto," he answered.

"The wisdom of the serpent must warn us not to rush blindly forward in pursuit of any object. If your zeal had been awakened, I must have checked it; but the time is come now. Miss Percival

has not been thrown in your way for naught. Heaven has had mercy upon her youth and innocence, and wills that the talents which are now devoted to error, should be directed into their proper channel."

"But father," exclaimed the Countess, in astonishment, "surely you cannot be a judge of her character — of the probability of success."

"Nay, my daughter, upon that point you are in ignorance. Shall I tell you the state of Miss Percival's mind at this moment?"

Beatrice was silent.

"There are within her two contending principles," he continued; "or rather they are not principles, they are feelings. One is the breathing of an immortal spirit for the happiness which this world cannot give; the other is the dawning of a love for a human being, such as hitherto, I firmly believe, she has never experienced. She would serve her God, and she would devote herself to you."

"To me, father," exclaimed the Countess; "me, whom she has known so little!"

"It matters not; I have watched her narrowly, and the experience of years has taught me much of the working of the human heart. If her devotion to you is now only in its germ, it may be ripened into fulness, and that quickly.

Beatrice rose and walked a few paces apart, in deep thought; then abruptly turning to him, she said, "And I too, father, could love a heretic. Yes," she added, seeing that he hesitated to reply, "I would not, even if I could, conceal anything from you. There is a love which nothing can recall; it is buried in my husband's grave, and on earth it can never wake again. Since that hour of desolation, when I watched his dying bed, human affection has seemed almost dead within me, save only in my reverence for you; but now it has again revived. It may be delusion, father; it may be folly; and I know, I would confess — that it is sin," she added, in a deep, low tone.

"Sin, if it should lead you to a neglect of our holy faith, my daughter; but not sin, if it should lead to the gathering of a lost sheep into the one true fold. Let your love be hallowed by this hope, and you need not fear it."

"Hope!" exclaimed the Countess, whilst a sudden enthusiasm lighted up her countenance. "Can you really think that there is hope?"

"The greatest — almost certain hope; but everything will depend upon your caution."

"Then I need not go away; I may spend the dreary winter months in my home," said Beatrice.

Father Andrea smiled at the change from her late disappointment at Henningsley, to this sudden attachment for it. You may not further your cause by that means," he replied; "and I will own I would not trust you: one unguarded word, and all may be lost. There is now a principle superior to Miss Percival's dawning affection for you—the religion which clings to the cold faith of her Protestant ancestors. Once alarm her on this point, and she will feel it a duty to draw back."

"Pardon me, father, but you are seemingly inconsistent," said the Countess. "I am to believe that there is hope, but I am not to act upon it; and it appears that I am not to remain in the only spot where I can expect to be of use."

"Your health is the first great object," replied the confessor. "I have heard warnings upon the subject before. At least, for this first winter, it will be advisable to avoid all risk; and for use, you may perhaps do more by your absence than your presence. You must find some excuse for writing; Miss Percival will be flattered; and it will afford you opportunities for saying all that is necessary, without giving rise to suspicion."

"And I must go then!" exclaimed the Countess. "I must leave the only spot where I have found sympathy, and go amongst those who look with suspicion on my religion, and merely think it necessary to pay me attentions because I am their relation."

"Your affection for one person ought not to render you unjust to others, my daughter," said Father Andrea, in a severe tone.

At that moment the pealing of the hall bell gave warning of a visitor.

"It may be Mrs. St. Aubyn," said the Countess; "she was to call for Lucia." There was a flush on her cheek as she spoke, which the expectation of seeing Mrs. St. Aubyn would not have caused.

Father Andrea collected some letters that were lying on the table, but waited till the arrival should be announced. "You said, I think, that you expected Miss Percival," he observed, turning to Beatrice.

"She sent word that she would come if possible, but it was doubtful."

The servant's footsteps sounded in the ante-room.

"Caution," said Father Andrea, in a low voice: "remember there must be no betrayal of our wishes."

Beatrice bowed assent, and the next moment Margaret entered.

The Countess advanced eagerly to meet her, but it was with emotions which she could little have defined. Pleasure there was, such as she had never experienced before in Margaret's society; for who could be insensible to the thought of inspiring love, almost devotion, in one so untouched by the world — so simple, and ardent, and highly gifted? Yet as she gazed upon the sweet features, from which all signs of care had faded before the enjoyment of the moment, a pang, a transient but deep pang of regret, crossed the Countess's mind. Before the object which had been set before her could be attained, that easy cheerfulness must be destroyed by the most painful doubt; that quiet repose of manner must be disturbed by a conflict of mind, involving, it might be, a keener agony than any bodily suffering; and she herself was to inflict the suffering, not openly, but through the means of a pure confiding affection. The Countess's smile of welcome was checked, and the gloom which spread itself over her countenance was evident to Margaret's watchful eye. It was gone, however, almost as soon as noticed. Come what might, suffering or sorrow, of whatever kind, or to whatever extent, it was for the right cause. Who would not joy over martyrdom on earth to win the crown of glory in heaven? Father Andrea remained in the room, silent and occupied as usual; and the Countess, placing Margaret on a sofa which fronted a lovely slope of the smooth lawn, and a glade of the park, terminated by the grey church tower, drew a low, old fashioned chair to her side, and said, almost caressingly, as she attempted to draw off her shawl:

"You are come to spend a long two hours with me, so I must be careful of you."

"O no, indeed," replied Margaret; "not two hours — scarcely one. I am later than I expected."

"But you promised me, and I have been looking forward to it."

"I must not waste my precious moments in excuses," said Margaret, with a smile; "they are indeed very few; but I have remembered the book — the 'Milton.'"

She laid the volume on the table, and the Countess took it up, and turned over the pages. "Difficillissimo!" she said, shaking her head.

"Not worse than Dante," replied Margaret.

"Perhaps not; but I do not think an Englishman or an English woman's comprehension of Dante (forgive me for saying so) would satisfy me."

"I must own it is the comprehension of the head, and not of the heart, in general," replied Margaret.

"Yes, and perhaps necessarily: really to understand a book, one must enter into the author's tone of mind, and know the characteristics of the age in which he lived."

"I should despair of ever doing that with Dante," said Margaret. "What with the unsettled condition of the whole of Christendom, and the particular turmoils of his own city, one could scarcely hope to enter into the feelings of an ordinary individual, still less to fathom such depths as his must have reached."

"I shall turn round upon you with Milton," said the Countess, playfully, "and give up the attempt. Contrast these days of peace with his stormy ones."

"But the stormy ones were nearer our own times; and there are histories, and memoirs, and information of every kind to throw light upon them. I really hope you will try the book."

"And yet you acknowledge that Milton is no favourite."

"It is a dreadful heresy, I know," said Margaret. "I never confess it if I can help it, because people put it down as presumptuous: but he shocks me. Whilst he keeps to earth, I can admire heartily; but when he ventures beyond I am obliged to turn away. I dare say the fault is in my own irreverent mind."

"Then why should I read it?" inquired the Countess.

"Because it is one of our standard works, and there are very great beauties in it; and, in fact, you can be no judge of English literature unless you do."

The Countess again took up the volume. "I remember longing to read it as a child," she said; "and my father would not allow it. He was extremely careful then, for he used sometimes to fancy I had a leaning towards Protestantism."

"I do not think Lord de Lisle had reason to fear Milton," said Margaret. "He is not likely to excite much sympathy in a Roman Catholic."

Father Andrea, who had been sitting at a little distance, now, to Margaret's great surprise, rose and joined them; and, as if struck by the last words, he repeated them, and said in an indifferent tone —

"Will Miss Percival do me the favour to tell me why?"

Margaret blushed deeply, and hesitated. "His religion," she said; "he was such a violent Puritan."

"And do you dislike him for that reason?" inquired the Countess, quickly.

"Partly; and in politics likewise, all my principles go against him."

"You object to his religion, because he was an enemy to forms," said Father Andrea.

"Yes, in a certain way; but——," Margaret laughed, and added, "I don't think I am fond of being examined as to my likings and dislikings. I am afraid too often they are mere questions of taste."

"But religion cannot be," said the Countess, more gravely than was her wont.

Margaret coloured.

"I know it is usual for members of the Establishment in England to object to the principles of the Puritans," said Father Andrea; "but I could never obtain any satisfactory reason why; and I thought that perhaps Miss Percival's course of reading might have enabled her to enlighten me."

Margaret was displeased at the compliment implied, for she could not believe it to be sincere.

"I should have supposed," she said, "that after so many years of controversy, the case would have been made plain by books."

"Then your studies cannot have led you very deep in controversy," replied Father Andrea; "or your intellect must be much clearer than other persons."

"The usual end of controversy being to prove that both sides are wrong; is it not, father?" said the Countess, lightly.

"In many cases it may be, my daughter," replied the confessor, speaking so seriously that Margaret wondered at the Countess's boldness; "but you must remember that truth still exists; and that to see error in all things is not the right way of ascertaining it."

The Countess laid her hand affectionately upon his as he rested it on the table, and said,—"I never yet made a hasty speech in your presence, father, without quickly perceiving my folly."

"We will not call it folly," he replied; "there is wisdom in it; for all controversy which is not based upon some deep truth must at last come to this point. Such, I should venture to say, if Miss Percival would pardon me, has always appeared to me to be the case in the discussions between the Establishment in England and the other sects against which it contends."

"We do not call ourselves a sect," said Margaret, whose spirit was a little roused by the equality thus asserted for Dissenters.

"Yet upon what grounds? A sect is a section, a party, a small number; and even in England the Establishment can scarcely be said to command any large majority of the population."

"But we have antiquity, and law, and sobriety of forms, and so

much on our side," said Margaret, seizing in her haste upon the first weapons of defence which offered themselves.

"Granted entirely; and if we had now for the first time to choose for ourselves amongst the different religious systems of the day, undoubtedly yours would have great claims upon our attention. But this will not suffice in an argument. We may not deliver up a contested estate into the hands of the claimant who most pleases our taste."

"You are rather hard upon Miss Percival, father," said the Countess, observing Margaret's look of annoyance at being thus drawn into a conversation for which she was not prepared.

"Which is my last wish, my daughter," replied the confessor; "but it is natural to desire, whilst one is living in a country, to gain some insight into its institutions, and the established religion necessarily presents itself first."

"I should be glad," said Margaret, in a tone of simple earnestness which had often caught the Countess's attention, contrasting peculiarly with her superiority of talent,—"I should like to hear any one else talk to you about it; but I am so very ignorant, I am afraid."

"Yet you have said what I have heard others say continually," replied Father Andrea. "It may be my own obtuseness which prevents me from perceiving the true strength of your position. Antiquity and law, you say, you have on your side?"

"Yes," replied Margaret, recovering herself a little; "and more than that, Episcopacy, we know, was the system of government of the primitive Church."

"Undoubtedly; it is a fact acknowledged by the whole Christian world. But I think you would find as an argument against you, that different ages and different countries require different forms of government."

"Still," said Margaret, not clearly perceiving the ground upon which she stood, and anxious to fortify it at all hazards, "the religion which is pronounced by the law of the land to be the best, and which has been upheld for centuries, must stand upon higher ground than any other."

Father Andrea paused: "You will think me very captious," he said, after a moment's thought; "but the law pronounces Presbyterianism to be the best religion for Scotland, and I have heard many members of the Establishment in England say that they should think it their duty to attend the services of the kirk, I believe it is called."

"Yes, I don't know, I never thought about it," replied Margaret, looking distressed.

"Then the two forms of religion are on an equality?" said Father Andrea.

Margaret could not at the instant say they were not. The Countess who had been listening attentively again interposed: "Father, indeed you are hard upon Miss Percival; you forget how much early association and habit must have accustomed her to reverence the English Church."

"The English Establishment, my daughter," said the confessor, with marked emphasis. "No, indeed, I do not; I can honour and appreciate the attachment to forms which we have reverenced from childhood. If Miss Percival were a Presbyterian, doubtless her affections would be as strongly enlisted on the side of the kirk."

"No, believe me," exclaimed Margaret; "that could never be. My taste would always prefer the services of the Church of England. I cannot endure extempore prayers and preachings."

"But if you had always heard them," said the Countess, "you would probably think differently."

Margaret shook her head: "I could have no zeal for such a church," she said. "I can scarcely imagine its inspiring any."

"That was not the feeling of the Covenanters," observed Father Andrea.

"Nor of the Puritans," continued Beatrice.

"They were Independents, principally," said Margaret.

"Independents, fifth-monarchy men, whatever you call them," remarked the confessor, "still they all stand upon the same ground. They fought, and fought vigorously, for that which they believed to be truth."

"Yes," said Margaret, thoughtfully: "one must acknowledge that."

"And there were martyrs amongst them," continued Father Andrea. "Milton would have been a martyr if he had been brought to the trial."

Margaret smiled, and answered, "If I am ever converted to Puritanism, the world will scarcely believe it was through your means."

Father Andrea did not make a direct reply, but taking up the volume of the Paradise Lost, began to remark upon the peculiarities of the style, which to a foreigner rendered it very difficult, though to him, he said, it might be less so than to many, as he had so long been in the habit of reading and speaking English, that it seemed almost as familiar as his native tongue. The

Countess was interested in his observations. He was little in the habit of conversing upon any subject except those immediately connected with his Church; and Margaret, who at first had been vexed at his presence, as being an interruption to the pleasure she had anticipated with the Countess, found herself by degrees, in the act of giving explanations, they might almost have been called instructions, to the reserved cold mannered Romish priest, whom she had before so much dreaded. Beatrice looked round occasionally for Lucia, and was glad that she was engaged for the afternoon. When she was present there was always a certain degree of restraint in her intercourse with Margaret, for the Italian jealousy, though it slumbered, was by no means dead, and the least incautiousness might reawaken it. Several times, in the course of the conversation, the Countess was upon the point of mentioning her projected absence; but she was stopped by the hope that after all it might not be necessary. Father Andrea however alluded to it, as Margaret rose to depart.—"If I had the prospect of remaining here during the winter," he said, "I should hope in time to master all the difficulties of your great poet."

Margaret looked up in surprise. "I was trying to forget, father," said the Countess, half-reproachfully. "There is no need to speak of parting to-day, but it is true that I must leave Henningsley for the winter, before another fortnight is over." A sensation of faintness was at Margaret's heart, and then it throbbed quickly. The Countess held her hand without speaking. Margaret felt ashamed of her own weakness. She struggled against it, but in vain. Her eyes glistened and her lips quivered. Father Andrea as he turned away cast on her a glance rapid but penetrating, which seemed as if it would have read her inmost thoughts.

"We shall not forget each other," said the Countess.

Margaret's answer was inarticulate, but the Countess's hand was clasped within hers, and the silent pressure spoke the warmth of their mutual affection. Father Andrea opened the door, and said in a tone of less seriousness than usual—"We are friends, Miss Percival, even though I may think more highly of the Puritan poet than you would deem desirable."

Margaret smiled.

"Friends always," he continued, as he shook hands; "for ever, we may hope." The last words were earnest, even paternal; and Margaret was touched by them. They parted cordially; and Father Andrea returned to the Countess with an expression of satisfaction in his face.

"Father, I am puzzled," exclaimed Beatrice; "completely puzzled. What have you been doing?"

"Laying the first stone of our future edifice," he replied.

"But by upholding Puritanism?"

"Nay, my daughter, you must recollect, we are not to build upon unoccupied ground; our first object must be to destroy that which already cumbers it."

"Addition seems a strange mode of destruction," said the Countess.

"Think of this," replied Father Andrea. "There is no principle more utterly fallacious than that which would make truth consist in liberty of opinion. It is proved to be false, because the moment you attempt to put it in practice it ceases to exist. The wildest supporters of perfect equality and freedom demonstrate the fact by the intolerance which they show to all who differ from them: the demagogues of the French Revolution, for instance. If this is true in politics, still more is it true in religion. Atheism itself becomes a system of dogmas. The first step is to deny the being of a God; the second, to set up the goddess of reason in His stead. Now to apply this principle to the present case, you will find amongst Protestant sects as much exclusiveness as they complain of in the one true Church. The Establishment in England sets itself above all others for one reason; the Establishment in Scotland for another; Independents for another; Baptists for another; even Unitarianism claims to have the peculiar exercise of reason. Miss Percival trusts what she calls her Church, because it has a claim to some antiquity, and suits her taste; but if you can bring her to see that Dissenters have an equal claim to her respect, the prestige, for it is nothing more, which now makes the Establishment venerable, will cease; she will be driven from her position."

"I do not quite see this, father," said the Countess; "and do not call me presuming, it seems a very long way to go before reaching our point."

"Like other things, my daughter, long in the beginning, and short in the end. You do not think a mind like Miss Percival's can rest happy in the belief that truth exists nowhere?"

"No, indeed; but does such a belief follow from her seeing the good in other systems?"

"Yes, if she has no firmer ground to stand upon than an equality of good in her own. Episcopacy is established, but so is Presbyterianism; Episcopacy has its zealous defenders, so have all the other forms of government; Episcopacy has its martyrs,

so have they; by degrees, notwithstanding their wide differences, all will appear alike. Now, no mind capable of any thought, and really earnest like hers, can long endure this absence of positive truth; to say nothing of the pride which often mingles with our purest motives, and makes us long for superiority."

Beatrice was thoughtful; at length she said: "When you have brought her to own that all are equal, father, what will be the consequence?"

"She will immediately seek for something beyond; for that which is only to be found in the Catholic Church: a divine appointment, and an external authority."

"You are too deep for me, father," said the Countess, with a faint smile; "I should have proceeded much more simply."

"And so have defeated your own purpose. If you alarm her, she is lost. You, educated in Italy, can have no idea of the strength of prejudice which exists in England against the true faith."

"But the English Establishment does assert something of a divine right and an external authority," said the Countess.

"Yes, it asserts; but what is assertion against facts which pass before our eyes? How can Miss Percival discover any power in the system as it is exhibited in this village? What is its working, even in its best form, compared with the gigantic efforts of the Catholic Church? Besides, you see that she scarcely knows the existence of a claim to divine right. Her arguments were based upon law, antiquity, and taste—all utterly futile."

"And why futile, father?"

"Because, to found any religion upon law is to substitute a temporal for a spiritual authority. To rest it upon antiquity makes it merely a question of private judgment as to whether our ancestors were wiser than ourselves; to-day we think they were, to-morrow we may determine they were not. And with regard to taste, if Miss Percival is ever converted from her fatal errors, it will be in a great measure, humanly speaking, by her refinement of taste. She will easily be made to acknowledge the infinite superiority of our magnificent ceremonies, compared with her own cold worship. First shake her faith in her Church, and then arouse her feelings, and appeal to her taste, and the work is accomplished."

CHAPTER XXVI.

FATHER ANDREA was right. Even with the Countess's last look, and the mingled tenderness and sadness of her parting words still resting on her memory, Margaret left Henningsley with seeds of uneasiness in her mind, more deeply rooted than any which the prospect of an earthly change could implant. The Countess might be absent for a while, but it was greater happiness to believe that her affection had been awakened, than it was sorrow to fear the being deprived of her society. Such at least was Margaret's first feeling, though when she approached her home, and all its anxieties, those caused by her brother especially, were recalled, a sense of desolation stole over her, and the transitoriness of earthly pleasures made her spirits sink almost to the state of depression which a few months before had rendered her existence "flat, stale, and unprofitable." In such a mood Margaret had learnt there was but one comfort—religion; active, humble, self-denying, and full of a childlike faith; and it was this comfort which Father Andrea's words had shaken. Margaret had never said to herself that she was working for the English Church; when her uncle had put forward the idea as a duty, she had found it too difficult for her reason, and she thought that she had taken a wider view of Christianity, but it was not so. How many hundreds are there at this moment in England, who like her have unconsciously twined their affections around the Church of their fathers, and who start back from the first weapon of offence which assails it, not because they have any deep appreciation of its inestimable worth, but because they have associated with it the recollections of by-gone days and of affections which death has severed; who love to dwell upon the material building, with the old fantastic monument which attracted their childish admiration, or to kneel again in fancy in the corner of the large cumbersome pew, into which they were first brought to offer their public devotions; who delight to fill the vacant seats with the forms of friends and companions, parents, brothers, sisters, or to recall the sense of secrecy and romance with which the privileged spot was invested, when the curtain was closely drawn around, and the voice of the preacher sounded amongst the heavy pillars, less like a call to battle with a deadly foe, than the soft murmur of gentle admonition. They are prejudices hallowed and venerable, and they may

not be lightly disturbed; but in the fierce contest with the claims of an opposing Church, they will slip from our grasp, and leave us helpless and unresisting, a prey to the first asserter of high spiritual power; whether, as in the case of dissent, supposed to be derived immediately from Heaven; or in that of Romanism, to have been transmitted through long ages from the traditions of the Apostles. It was not the spiritual church which Margaret loved, but the old ivy-mantled tower and her own peculiar seat, and the familiar faces which appeared Sunday after Sunday in their fixed places in the adjoining pews; and the words of the prayers were valued, not because they were a precious inheritance from the primitive ages of Christianity, but because they harmonised with a pure taste, and expressed fully and forcibly the needs which in her own language she would have found it difficult to utter. A change seemed suddenly to have come upon all these things,—"a glory had passed from them." The Church had been depreciated,—it had been called a sect. Margaret asked herself why she had thought so highly of it, and she could give no more satisfactory reply now than she had done when questioned by Father Andrea. It was the most respectable communion, certainly; all her own friends belonged to it. It was supported, (that was the term which she had often heard,) by the nobility and gentry in England; but to what did all this amount? In the eyes of a foreigner, a Romanist, she saw that it was nothing. Margaret cast her eye upon the red brick building, the excrescence which the niggardliness of a century before had attached to the venerable tower, and she no longer wondered. The edifice was the visible symbol of her faith. The illusion with which her childish recollections had hallowed it were dissipated, and it stood before her in its native deformity. She thought of the weed-covered churchyard, the neglected poor, the indolent rector; and she was ashamed,—not ashamed of the human sins and ignorance which had caused such a state of things to grow up unchecked; but of the Church which in her prayers and her ordinances, in her rubrics and her canons, provides for the solemn celebration of public services; enjoins upon her children a life of humility, devotion, penitence, and self-denial; and would train them up in the way in which they should go, that so, when they are old, they may not depart from it. Margaret remembered St. Ouen, the first Romanist church she had ever seen. Reason told her that it was a false argument which would lead her to judge of the merits of a religious system from the beauty of the temples in which its worship was offered; but Margaret was not then in a disposition

to reason. Her fancy had been awakened; and, without knowing it, she was prejudiced in favour of any belief held by the Countess Novera. She could not imagine her a Protestant. The sobriety of the English ritual seemed little to assimilate with her bursts of enthusiasm, and the graceful dignity of her manner and the elegance of her appearance suited much better with the splendour of St. Ouen, than with the poverty of the old church of Deering. Protestantism, it seemed certain, could have no attractions in her eyes; and though her regard for Margaret's prepossessions had prevented her from openly declaring her opinion, it was evident that she, as well as Father Andrea, could perceive little difference between the English Church and Puritanism. Margaret indulged in a moody discontent for the remainder of her walk. She sent the children from her, and at last created a day dream of a life at Henningsley, with the Countess as her friend and guide. And what was to be done with the religion? For that moment it was set aside: she had no thought of converting the Countess, and she had no fear lest the Countess should convert her. It was all very well to look at Romanism at a distance, and admire it; but there were grievous errors which never could be received. She could not worship the Virgin, and pray to saints, and put faith in relics: all these were absurdities, therefore safe-guards. She might go as near as she liked to the forbidden fruit: she might look at, examine, touch; but she had been told that the taste was bitter, and therefore she need not dread the temptation of plucking it. If Margaret had been accused of self-confidence, she would have rejected the accusation with sincerity. If the trial had come in another form, if it had been an open sin which thus assailed her with its lures, she would have said at once that she could not trust herself; that to dwell even upon a crime which may be repugnant to our nature, from which we should at first turn with loathing, may in time lead us to destruction; and she would have shut her eyes and closed her ears in distrust, not of the power of truth and holiness, but of her own inherent weakness. But the present temptation came before her in another shape, as an angel of light rather than of darkness. It appealed to her longing after perfection, to her belief of what the worship of God might and ought to be; and it did not invite her to find rest in another communion, it only opened her eyes to the glaring defects of her own. Before she reached home, Mr. Sutherland's idea of working for the English Church seemed more impracticable than ever. If the existence of the Church had hitherto appeared an abstraction which her mind could not grasp, now it

had melted away entirely, lost amid the heterogeneous medley of opinions which she had been accustomed to include in the term Protestantism.

The first person who greeted Margaret's eye when she entered the house was her mother,—a frown on her forehead, a watch in her hand.

"Twenty minutes after the time, Margaret; what have you been doing? You will tire the children to death, if you take them for such long walks."

"I was at Henningsley, mamma," said Margaret, knowing by experience that there was a magic in the name.

"At Henningsley, were you?—did you see the Countess?"

"Yes, I was with her some time; and the children played in the garden."

"Oh!"—Mrs. Percival could still almost have found it in her heart to administer a reproof. "You ought to have been here before, though," she said; "you have been wanted."

"By Craven?" inquired Margaret, attempting to smile.

"Yes, he told me he had seen you; and he seemed disappointed that you should have stayed away from him so long, when he had but just arrived."

Margaret made an excuse, and went to her room. Why was it more difficult to bear with complaint now than it was usually? Why did Craven's injustice and thoughtlessness particularly strike her? Why did she think of the morrow, and Agatha's return, with increased pain? It was the world within, not the world without, which was in fault. But a short space was left before the dinner bell would ring. Margaret had intended to dedicate it to self-recollection and prayer, for experience had taught her that the devotion which is exercised only at the beginning and close of the day will insensibly become weaker and weaker as it struggles against the manifold trials of domestic life. One of her strictest rules had been to give up some time in the middle of the day to private prayer, and nothing had been hitherto allowed to interfere with the duty. If it was not performed at one hour, it was at another. The fixed time was between luncheon and the children's walk; but this day it had been postponed by a morning visitor, and now Margaret wished to recall her scattered thoughts, and, as it were, re-tune her mind before going down to dinner. If she did not, the presence of Craven, and her mother's censures or questions, would in all probability put the finishing stroke to her unhappiness, by making her feel that her temper was not yet under subjection, nor her will resigned to the circum-

stances of her earthly lot. But Margaret's unsettled thoughts followed her even into the presence of her Maker. She had compiled for herself from the Church services and the Psalms a short form which she had been accustomed to make the frame-work of her prayers. It had been selected from suiting her own especial wants, and hitherto it had satisfied her; but a criticising spirit had taken possession of her, and when her book was opened the first thoughts which arose was whether the prayers were as good as she had imagined; whether Father Andrea and the Countess would admire them. Margaret was shocked at herself, but not because this was not the manner in which she ought to look at the Church prayers, but because the idea came at a wrong moment. She turned from it immediately, and when her devotions were ended she could acknowledge with satisfaction that nothing better could be desired than the "form of sound words" which she had uttered from the heart, expanding and concentrating them as occasion required, so as to embody the particular necessities of the moment. She dressed herself and went down stairs happier than before, more satisfied that the prayers of the Church were not merely equal, but far superior to any extempore effusions, however sincere and eloquent. She thought that she would take a prayer book with her the next time she went to Henningsley, that she might explain it to the Countess, and excite her admiration also. Margaret had no notion of error in thus praising instead of reverencing, for she did not see that she was placing herself in a wrong position with regard to the Church; the position of a child, who obeys his parents because they are kind to him, and try to teach him what is right, and not because the imperative law of God has said, "Honour thy father and thy mother, that thy days may be long in the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee." It would have been hard to blame Margaret for such a spirit, for it was the natural consequence of the view which she had learnt to take of the authority of the Church, deriving it from human power, not divine. That which man has created, man may alter and destroy; and the same legislature which fixed upon Presbyterianism as the best religion for Scotland, might also, if it saw fit, establish any other species of dissent as the most desirable for England. Margaret's affections might in that case still cling to the Church of her fathers, but there could be no law to enforce an adherence to it. She would support, admire, and whilst she supported and admired she would obey; but the obedience due to the object of our own choice is but

another word for obedience to our individual will; and the Bible does not say, "Let every soul be subject to the higher powers, because they are good and holy, and approve themselves to our conscience;" but it gives the injunction broadly, strongly, without definition or limitation, to teach us that subjection to law, fixed and unchangeable, is the condition of man's existence in happiness here, as it must be of his hopes of blessedness hereafter.

Margaret had no opportunity of conversing with her brother before dinner, and afterwards Dr. Percival engrossed him entirely; making him recount his Irish adventures and disasters, — the attacks of the peasantry, and the repulses of the soldiers. The descriptions were given with infinite humour, and Margaret laughed heartily; whilst Dr. Percival seemed to have forgotten all his son's misdemeanours in delight at his cleverness.

"Well! Craven," he exclaimed, as he stretched himself in his chair, wearied at length with the pleasure of listening; "people may say what they will, but the army is a fine field for a young man. It throws him into the world upon his own resources. I am not sure that George would not have done much better if he had gone to Sandhurst. The Church is but plodding up-hill work at the best."

"George is very firm to his choice," observed Margaret. "He told me in the summer that the more he thought of it the more he liked it."

"George is a strange fellow," said Dr. Percival, "not a bit like any of you. I'll tell you, Margaret, the only person he ever reminds me of, your uncle Henry."

"Does he?" said Margaret; "then I am sure we ought all to be contented."

"Yes, he has just the same quiet humour and odd way of looking at things."

Margaret would have preferred hearing that he had just the same piety and zeal, but this, perhaps, was not to be expected in a boy.

"The worst of the Church," continued Dr. Percival, "is, that it requires such a long preparation. One is obliged to spend a fortune before a young man can take his degree, and when he has done it, there is little prospect for him, beyond starving for life upon ninety or a hundred a year."

"Our rich Church!" said Margaret.

"Our rich Church, you may well say;" replied her father; "but people's eyes are beginning to be opened to that falsehood.

Where would the Church be, if it were not for the private fortunes which are brought into it?"

"Where George will be one of these days," said Craven, "in a great mess."

"Poor George!" half sighed Dr. Percival. "Well, it is his own doing. I have warned him again and again that he is making a mistake, that he must not expect any help from me."

Craven thought that they were treading upon dangerous ground. He took up a book, and hoped his father would go to sleep, but Dr. Percival was roused by his subject.

"What was that you heard about George, from some one who had been at Eton, Craven?"

"Merely that he was doing very well, sir: likely to cut a figure."

"That is the only thing which satisfies me as to his profession," continued Dr. Percival. "I have thought sometimes lately, whether it would not have been wiser to have taken his godfather's offer, and put him into a merchant's house."

"What! George, papa?" exclaimed Margaret.

"George!" echoed Mrs. Percival, who caught the last sentence, as she came into the room from paying her last maternal visit to the children.

"Yes, George:" repeated Dr. Percival, sharply; and sitting upright in his chair, he cast an irritable glance around him.

"You don't think Mr. Dampier would take me instead, sir, do you?" said Craven.

"Not quite, Craven: you are not exactly the stuff of which a merchant's clerk should be made; but as to your mother and Margaret exclaiming in such a fuss about George, it is absurd. A steady well-conducted boy, he would gain a fortune in no time."

"A good hit at me," whispered Craven to his sister.

"But his talents," said Mrs. Percival: "really my dear, you forget sometimes what your children are worth,"

"Shall I tell you, Julia?" said Dr. Percival; "worth nothing —not a penny; that is what I want you all to learn. It is very well to live in comfort now, but if anything happens to me, every one must take care of himself; and so George was a foolish fellow for refusing Dampier's offer, and insisting upon taking to the Church; and I was a foolish father for allowing it."

"I don't think you will regret it, dear papa," said Margaret, gently.

"Very possibly not, Margaret, if he does well and is happy;

but the thing which annoys me is that you should not all see that money is of importance."

Craven looked his thoughts of amusement, that any teaching should be deemed requisite on such a subject, but he did not venture to utter them. Mrs. Percival waited till she heard the first snore, which was not long in giving notice that sleep had gained its usual victory over Dr. Percival's senses, and then turning to Margaret, she said, "Your father is so strange upon that point; he thinks that I have not the same care for my children's interests that he has."

"He is worried just now, I suspect," said Margaret.

"Yes, a little. There came in a long bill this afternoon, which I was obliged to give him, from the coachmaker's. I can't think why it was not kept till Christmas."

"Let us have a little music, Margaret," said Craven, abruptly.

"Papa must have known it was going on," observed Margaret, replying to her mother.

"Oh, yes, of course he did; and he can settle it without any difficulty; but it is his way just for the time. He forgets that everything is doing well, and Agatha is off his hands."

"And on Colonel Clive's," said Craven.

"She can be no burden to any one, Craven. A prince might be proud of her for his wife."

"The thing I want to know," continued Craven, "is whether the Colonel's affection extends to the whole family. Does he patronise you, Margaret?"

"Patronise! my dear boy, what a word!" interrupted Mrs. Percival. "Who could think of patronising Margaret?"

"Why, no one, I must own;" said Craven, surveying his sister with an air of mingled criticism and pleasure. "There is a something about Margaret, I confess, which would not attract patronage. A sort of sevenfold fence—of—what is it?—reserve?"

"Nonsense, Craven," said Margaret, laughing: "you know I never allow personal observations. What shall I play to you?"

"It is a great deal too late for music to-night," observed Mrs. Percival; "if your brother wishes for it you must begin earlier another evening."

"Only one thing,—just one;" said Craven, imploringly.

"No, my dear, I can't indeed. The servants will be kept up. —Margaret, I wish you would take these books into the library."

Margaret did as she was told, and was carrying off a pile of

books in one hand, and a candlestick in the other, when Craven followed, offering to help her.

"I can't stand this much longer," he said, throwing down the volumes upon the library table, and closing the door. "Margaret, why does my mother fidget so?"

"It is a mere nothing," said Margaret. "She likes every one to be in bed in good time, that's all."

"But it is not in this only; it is in everything. Not to be allowed to have a little music if one likes it! Really, if one was a baby in arms, one couldn't be treated worse."

"If you were a baby in arms you would probably bear it better," said Margaret, smiling; "but seriously, it is very unjust in you, Craven. Suppose in a large family each person was allowed to have his own way, what would become of comfort?"

"What is comfort without freedom? I wish, Margaret—yes, I wish with all my heart I belonged to any family but this."

Craven seated himself at his ease in an arm-chair, and Margaret was obliged to remind him that their mother would miss them, and come to find them.

"But, Margaret, I can't be ruled in this way; I must have some talk with you to-night. You are the only rational being in the house."

"Then you must come to my room, there is no other place."

Craven rushed up the stairs hastily, wished his mother good night, and before Margaret had been told the plans for the next day, which were always enumerated over night, he had taken possession of her room, and was comfortably established, in expectation of a midnight talk.

"Now, Craven! acknowledge you are very foolish," said Margaret, lightly, as she rested herself against the arm of his chair, and pushing back the hair which clustered over his handsome forehead, gave him a kiss.

"'Foolish' may mean many things, Margaret," replied Craven, drawing a long breath. "Perhaps I am more foolish than you would give me credit for."

"I did not mean to recall old grievances," said Margaret. "All I meant was about mamma."

"Never mind her: I should not, if it were not for other things."

"I thought that was all," observed Margaret in a voice of sadness; "but how can I help you in the other things?"

"That is the question. I don't think you can."

"Let me hear them," said Margaret.

"No, it will be no good." He was silent for an instant, and then exclaimed: "I would give the world if you were Agatha!"

"Don't wish that," said Margaret, very gravely.

"Well! not Agatha; but any one else with a good handsome fortune. You would help me out of a difficulty, wouldn't you?"

"Yes, of course, in a moment; if it were right."

"Leave the right; I am not in a humour for it."

"But you must be, dear Craven; or I must not talk to you."

Craven looked at her steadily, and said, "Margaret, I think you are grown very old."

"Eighteen my last birth-day; that will be nineteen in two months' time. It is advancing certainly."

"And I am four-and-twenty: our ages ought to be reversed."

"Women always are older than men," said Margaret.

"Six years' difference!" continued her brother, speaking slowly; "but somehow, Margaret, I have rather a respect for you." He jumped up from his chair, and walking to the table, began to turn over the books which were scattered upon it. Then, bursting into a laugh, he exclaimed, "By the by, you have never told me what sort of appearance our venerable brother-in-law made when he led his fair bride to the altar?"

Margaret was too much accustomed to his caprice of manner to be at all startled by this change. "I am not going to talk about Colonel Clive, Craven," she said quietly, but with great firmness. "It is late, and if you have nothing more to say to me, you must leave me."

"Say!" he repeated; "I have things to say which would occupy half the night."

"Then they must be left till to-morrow," said Margaret, opening the door for him to pass; but he closed it again quickly, and as if inspired with a sudden resolution, exclaimed, "The truth is, Margaret,—it's no use trying to hide it,—I'm in a desperate plight."

Margaret was about to answer—"So soon! again!" but she stopped in time, or his fit of candour might have passed, not to return.

"That paltry three hundred!" he continued with vehemence: "It was a drop of water in the ocean!" and then he added, hurrying over the words,—"Fifteen! what do you say to fifteen, Margaret?"

Poor Margaret gasped for breath. Craven put on an air of indifference, but the penetrating eye of affection could see that there was remorse beneath. Margaret sat down in the nearest chair, her face was flushed, but she kept a steadfast control over

her manner, and without expressing surprise or distress, said, "And how have you managed to spend so large a sum?"

"It was not spent, exactly," he replied, with some hesitation; "but after all, there is nothing so very monstrous. Many men, I know, run away with three times the amount."

"All things by comparison," said Margaret, trying hard not to show her annoyance at his attempted excuses. "One thing is certain, Craven, it is a very large debt for my father to pay."

"There's the rub, Margaret. It strikes me that his excellency is not quite in the humour to hear it mentioned."

"No, indeed," said Margaret. "Did you come over with any idea of finding that he was?"

"Why, not precisely. I came—I don't know why I came. Affairs were at a desperate pass, and I was desperate too."

"Yet it is strange," said Margaret, after a little thought. "How has it gone, Craven?"

"Gone! I wish it was gone; but it is to come!"

"Well, but how? What have you been doing?"

"Oh! as to that, there is no use in inquiring. Put you into the army, and you would soon understand how money goes."

"Yet I should like to be told," said Margaret, in a voice of great gentleness; "because, if I am to help you in any way, (though I can't imagine how,) it may be necessary."

"It is merely doing what every one else does; what one is forced into, indeed," said Craven. "But, Margaret, I will tell you why I came. I had a sort of wild notion that perhaps Agatha could assist me. She must be rolling in riches now, and she is a good-natured girl."

"A very vain hope," said Margaret, sadly. "You don't imagine, do you, that Colonel Clive has made over all his property to her?"

"No, I was not fool enough for that; but I had a fancy that she must have something at command,—a few hundreds; and that would do just for the present. The duns I don't mind, it is only serving them as one has done fifty times before."

"Then if you do not fear the duns, what do you fear?" asked Margaret.

"Trust a woman's curiosity," he exclaimed, with something of his former lightness of manner. "I suppose you can't understand what a debt of honour means?"

"Gaming!" exclaimed Margaret, in a tone of horror.

"Craven saw the expression of her countenance: it was a miserable reproach for his conduct. "Don't fuss yourself so, Margaret, love," he said, drawing near to her; "it is only because

you are not in the habit of hearing of these things: no one else thinks about them."

"But, Craven, my father! what will he say?"

Craven struck his forehead, and turned away. "I'm a horrid coward, Margaret," he said, after a pause; "I could face a cannon ball sooner than my father's look."

"So could I," said Margaret.

Her brother seemed surprised by the avowal. "I thought you never feared anything, Margaret. I have rested upon that."

Margaret sighed deeply. "There is enough to make one fear now," she said.

"Not you; you have no cause for it. But are you sure that Agatha can do nothing?"

"Positively certain. She has a handsome allowance, yet only sufficient for her position; and everything else is settled upon her after Colonel Clive's death. The estate, you know, can never be hers."

"And she has no ready money? nothing to help one at an emergency?"

"Nothing whatever."

Craven stood considering, and at length said; "It is absurd in my father to pretend he can't help. If I had his fortune, I would live like a prince." Margaret thought that he seemed inclined to do so without it, but she let him go on free from interruption. "It is the telling, that I am afraid of," he said.

"You may write."

"And not be answered: when the three hundred were sent me, my father vowed he would never listen to another application."

"Yet there is no other hope," observed Margaret. "He must listen to you if you speak to him."

"I can't, Margaret. You may as well tell me to do the most unheard of impossibility. I could die sooner."

"Then, my dear Craven, what can you do?"

"As I have before," he answered, vehemently: "go back and stake my last farthing, and run my chance. I meant," he added, with a quieter tone, "to have broken off. I said I would, if I could be freed; but there is no other alternative."

"Did you really say it?" asked Margaret; and her face was lighted up with hope. "Could you promise it, Craven?"

"I would promise anything to be out of this fearful mess. I would work as a galley slave — starve in a dungeon, rather than bear what I have borne lately."

"But," said Margaret, "you have only to say this to my father.

heavy and unrefreshing, but she rose to her usual duties with an energy damped only by the chilling remembrance of Father Andrea's conversation. It was a holiday; Mrs. Percival had insisted upon it; and Margaret had neither the will nor the wish to oppose, though she could not tell why it was necessary, as Agatha and Colonel Clive were to arrive at Ashington, not the Grove; and Agatha had particularly mentioned that they were likely to be uncertain in their movements, so that no one was to be there to meet her. But the bustle of Mrs. Percival's mind always exhibited itself in her actions, and infused itself into her household. Margaret thought of Henningsley; the repose of the Countess's manner was a characteristic which struck her anew whenever she was in her company. It was not reserve, nor indifference, nor was it the easy polish of one accustomed to the refinements of the highest circles of society. It was something above and beyond all these—the repose of a mind calmed by suffering, superior to petty foibles—a mind full of lofty thoughts, and passing through the turmoil of life untouched by the movements which excite and agitate the mass of mankind. A charm there might be also in the dignity of one who had few earthly needs, and threw the burden of providing for them upon others. The Countess was not harassed by trials of temper; she had "no thought for the morrow," because in a worldly sense the morrow was provided for. All things at Henningsley were simple and undisturbed: orders were given and executed; wishes were expressed and gratified; not, however, that they were selfish and luxurious; for if they had been, Margaret would have been pained. But the life at the Grove, how different it was!—active, eager, conflicting, a world in itself, and many of those who took part in it undisciplined in spirit, and uncongenial. Margaret was full of energy, but it was energy refined and toned down. She had undergone a change even outwardly since the ideas first instilled by her uncle had actually guided her conduct. Her actions were slower, more considerate; her words were fewer; there was an air of self-recollection about her, which, perhaps, is one of the most powerful, though unconscious, means of influence exerted by the higher order of minds. There was nothing of this in her mother; nothing in her father; nothing, as yet, in the children. They seemed rushing through the world, catching at every passing object; and unmindful of that deep, dark current of time, which, whilst they were dreaming of days and hours, was bearing them on swifter than thought could measure to the unseen world, and in which, in a few short years, all human hopes must be engulphed.

A home, a quiet, happy, peaceful home, such as is sometimes believed to be the natural inheritance of women, was not Margaret's, and it is the blessing of the few, not of the many. There is seldom anything more delusive than the tranquillity which men harassed by business are apt to envy in a well-regulated family circle. They see everything outwardly smooth — no sighs, no complaints; or if there is an occasional cloud, they are too little acquainted with the different shades of character, even of those most nearly connected with them, to be aware of it. And as it is in the short intervals which they are allowed to pass with those they love, so they imagine it must be always. They think that where the strife of the world is not heard, there every other strife must be excluded. And yet in that orderly household, in that cheerful society, there is fought, hour by hour, the great battle of good and evil, as constantly, as vigorously, with as many hopes, and fears, and alternations of victory and defeat, as when men meet in the senate-house or the market, or mingle in the most crowded haunts of their fellow-beings. There were some who arose to scenes of anxiety on that morning, and thought of Margaret Percival as possessed of every blessing which could render existence enjoyable. Parents in prosperity, and in a position rather above what the circumstances of birth and fortune seemed naturally to indicate; a sister returning from a wedding tour to enter upon a life of luxury; duties in her home sufficient for rational occupation; talents which every one admired; — who could want more? Margaret did not; she knew and valued her advantages, and yet her first thought when she opened her eye to the light of the lovely autumn day, was, that life was full of care. The thought must come to all sooner or later; and however little we may be inclined to believe it, it is happy for us when the truth is understood in the days of our youth; for we have not then learnt to rest upon our own strength, we have not exhausted our higher energies in the enervating pursuits of the world, nor bartered the precious gifts of our spiritual inheritance for the fragile toys of fame, or wealth, or pleasure. A weary length of road may at times appear to be before us, and when we enter upon it, it may seem that there is little to cheer us, but the very infirmity of our nature will force us to seek for a support mightier than our own; and when we can bend our knees, and fold our hands in submission, and lifting our eyes to heaven, own ourselves helpless without God's help, the weight of our burden will adjust itself precisely to our need; and as it increases, so will the spirit within us be called forth to endure, until we have at

length learnt to realise the truth of the promise which can never be broken — "as thy days so shall thy strength be." Margaret was not overwhelmed by the troubles which were gathering around her; though she knew that they betokened, not a transient storm, but the steady succession of the appointed trials which were to purify her soul for heaven. One might pass, but another would follow in its stead. The great lesson which she had then to learn was to take each by itself; not to burden to-day with the anxieties of to-morrow. She was too much in the habit of doing this. Having promised to assist her brother out of his difficulties, at a great sacrifice to her own feelings, she went through the whole scene with her father; repeated his probable words, conjured up his look, rehearsed beforehand her mother's distress, and the manner in which it would be shown by increased vigilance over all her other children. She proceeded to dwell upon the defects of Craven's character, and the miseries into which they might lead him; a consideration which would have been extremely desirable if it had taught her merely to be more guarded over her own conduct when with him; and to pray, that he might be kept from temptation. But it went much further, and before Margaret was drest, she had placed her brother in situations of the utmost difficulty, caused by his own folly, and had seen him fall in each. So it was when she thought of the Countess's departure from Henningsley. She grieved over her absence as lasting, because it might be so possibly. At the present time there was no idea of her staying beyond the winter in Devonshire, but that was not sufficient for Margaret's anxious mind. This, and every other sorrow, was doubled by her imagination, and the cares of many succeeding weeks, and even years, were brought to increase those which were especially appointed for the hour; until the words "sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof," recurred to her memory, — and with them the lesson which they were so mercifully appointed to teach. The immediate troubles were then singled out from the rest, and Margaret repented the want of faith which had added to them so unnecessarily. Craven's face, when they met at breakfast, showed no regret, nor his manner any particular sense of his sister's good-nature. Generous, open-hearted people, as they are called, are often thoroughly selfish, and the fault is hidden not only from the world, but from themselves. It is in their private circles, amongst their relations, or perhaps their intimate friends, that it is discovered. Craven Percival had the reputation of being the most liberal, good-natured fellow in existence; and he actually believed himself to be so. He spent

his father's money, and imposed upon his sister's kindness; but his brother officers knew nothing of this, and as far as being reckless of expense, and willing to head any scheme of folly, may be considered to constitute liberality and good-nature, so far Craven certainly had great claims to the character he enjoyed. All this morning he was in the school-room, playing with the children, or lounging in an arm-chair, reading a novel. His life at home was generally insipid, and for that reason he seldom came there. He tried to engage Margaret in a bantering conversation, but Margaret was busy, and in her heart provoked, and soon made her escape; though she promised to walk with him in the afternoon. The promise was a little before luncheon, which came very opportunely for Craven's listlessness. He undertook to carve for the children, and managed at the same time to make a substantial repast. What else could an idle man do? as Margaret asked, when, after helping herself to a piece of cake and a little wine, she went to her own room. Philip was delighted at having an elder brother at home, and Mrs. Percival was proud of her handsome son, and particularly enjoyed his good spirits. She secretly wished some one would call that she might exhibit him, and looked up when the hall bell rang, expecting to be told of a visitor. But it was only Miss Debrett; and as a privileged person she was shown into the school-room. Craven received a hearty shake of the hand, which was given more to his owning the name of Percival than to any actual liking. Dislike him, Miss Debrett certainly did not; she could not absolutely be said to dislike any body, but she would rather have been out of his presence than in it. A few inquiries satisfied her that nothing had been heard of Agatha, and that, probably, nothing would be, till late in the day; and then she gave renewed attention to Craven, and congratulated Mrs. Percival with much warmth upon having him at home again, declaring he was looking particularly well, and adding that she would not repeat all the pretty things she had heard of him lately, for fear of making him blush.

"Now is that really your fear, Miss Debrett?" demanded Craven, gravely; delighting in taking everything she said literally, and then forcing her to explain herself. "Do you really think that I am given to blushing?"

"I don't know about the being given to it; you used to blush when you were a little boy."

"But since I have been a man, can you state it positively? because if you cannot, I must say you should be careful. To tell a man he blushes, is to tell him he is like a woman; and to tell him

he is like a woman is just another name for saying he is a coward; and you know if an officer is a coward he deserves to be drummed out of his regiment."

Harriet laughed heartily at her brother's tirade, but poor Miss Debrett received it as it was intended she should.

"My dear Craven," she began, her mouth twitching nervously, "you must let me call you Craven, because you know I held you when you were a baby; but you can't think I meant it, not for the world. Harriet, my love, you should not laugh so loud: your brother can't hear."

"Thank you, I hear quite well," said Craven.

"Well, then! let me tell you what Major Vernon said only last week—Major Vernon of the 97th: you know him of course." Craven bowed. "He is just come from Ireland, and we met in the street, and talked about you; we did, indeed; and he said that he did not know a finer young man anywhere—nor a braver, no doubt, he would have said, if he had not been in a hurry."

Craven kept his countenance and his attention immovable; and, when Miss Debrett stopped, answered:

"Brave you may well say. It requires bravery, I can assure you, to live in Ireland. A dreadful country! barbarous people!"

"Ah! indeed! so I've heard. I had a cousin living there once, who was shot quite dead one day when he was not thinking about it."

"Things are no better now," said Craven: "worse, one may say. We had a fierce engagement the other day, up in a wild part amongst the mountains. All our men were drawn up, bayonets pointed, the word of command just going to be given—when the mob dispersed, yelling and screaming; the village street was crowded; two women and a half a dozen children were thrown down in the scuffle; four dogs had their legs broken; and eight pigs' tails were pinched off; besides half a dozen policemen's staves knocked to atoms."

"Dreadful! dreadful!" sighed Miss Debrett.

"And besides this," continued Craven,—but Mrs. Percival interposed.

"Craven, I won't have you talk any more such rhodomontade. My dear Miss Debrett, he is laughing at us all. He likes Ireland very much, and he has a great many friends there." Craven bit his lip, and looked not very dutiful. Mrs. Percival was not partial to rhodomontade, and even her fondness for her eldest son could not induce her to bear it long. "I wanted to know about

Jenkins," she said, turning to Miss Debrett. "Is she finally resolved upon leaving you?"

"What, Jenkins!" exclaimed Craven; "that piece of perfection! that phœnix of abigails! you cannot have made up your mind to part with her!"

"No, my dear, not made up my mind, but, you see, she has made up hers."

"Jenkins is going to be married," said Mrs. Percival, shortly. Then, fearing lest Craven should again ramble off, she added, "I want to know whether you have met with any one instead."

"Why, I have a good many, but then they will none of them suit; that is, one will, but I am not quite sure."

"An answer worthy of the Delphic oracle," said Craven.

"Hush, my dear; you really are too absurd.— What do you mean, my dear Miss Debrett? Have you hired a maid instead of Jenkins?"

"No, indeed; how could you think I should do such a thing without consulting you? But the young woman who called this morning looks very neat, and is very civil; and if I had not been so flurried at hearing that Jenkins had actually fixed the day, I think she would have done for me."

"Why not take her, then?" inquired Mrs. Percival. "Children, you may say grace, and go up-stairs." The grace was mumbled over in a different way from what it would have been if Margaret had been present, Mrs. Percival continuing to speak at the same time. "Why don't you take her, my dear Miss Debrett?" she repeated.

"That was what I was going to talk to you about. You see there is an objection; she lives close by the lodge at Henningsley."

"A serious matter!" remarked Craven, shaking his head.

"Yes, you are right: it is very serious. As I said, she was a very tidy, civil-spoken young woman; but I had Jenkins in to see her, and Jenkins declares that she is a Papist; that is, she is not, but they say that her sister who lives in the same house is."

"Not unlikely," observed Mrs. Percival, "considering that so many of Lord de Lisle's tenants were of his faith."

"But the shocking thing is," continued Miss Debrett, that the mother is a very excellent, good-hearted woman; she goes regularly every Sunday to the Wesleyan meeting, and one of the sons is a preacher; and another has just turned Plymouth Brother. They are a very highly religious family, all of them; but the poor girl,

the sister of the one who came to me, is dying of a decline, and people say that the Italian Countess, and the Catholic priest, have managed to see her, and turn her; and there's a thought that this girl is not right either. Now it would be so dreadful to have a Roman Catholic in the house. I shouldn't feel I was safe in my bed."

"There you are quite right: I most highly applaud your principles," exclaimed Craven; "let me have anything but a Papist. I will just give you a sketch of the state of Ireland at this present time; you know they spring up like mushrooms there."

"Do they, indeed? I heard it was a horrible country."

"Two or three things I can prove to be facts," began Craven; but he did not go on, for Margaret came into the room, leading little Juliet, and Miss Debrett's attention was of course diverted to her; the state of her health, the length of her walk, the exact day when she had last seen her, ending with caresses to the child, and the production of a round box from the depths of a capacious pocket, in which lozenges and sugar-plums were always kept for the pleasure, as she said, but for the injury, as Mrs. Percival declared, of all the children in the neighbourhood. Craven was not to be diverted from his object, especially when that object was startling the nerves of a timid elderly female; and again he returned to the fearful state of the peasantry in Ireland. Margaret listened to him with more interest than usual; and when her brother perceived that he really had a sensible hearer, and that even Mrs. Percival said "Hush" to Juliet, and took her upon her lap to play with the spoons and be quiet, his own satisfaction in talking increased, and he related several stories free from gross exaggeration, which in their details were very painful.

Miss Debrett lifted up her hands and eyes, and many times ejaculated "Oh!" Mrs. Percival made a point of inquiring at the end of each fact, what was his authority, and if he were quite sure that he was repeating honestly; and Margaret gave her attention to the subject from a feeling stronger than curiosity. Unhappily, Craven was not always exact in what he said; and though, in this instance, he had been particularly careful, yet the discredit attached to his stories in general still remained. All that Margaret heard was received with a lurking mistrust. It might be true, but then Craven said it, and it was well known that he would add and embellish. She was silent, however, and Craven went on. Growing bolder by success, he amplified and gave inferences as facts. Margaret had a very clear head, and she cross-examined

cleverly and forced him to retract. The retractation nullified the effect of his previous assertions; and she ventured to hint at a few palliations for the crimes which he said had been committed by the people, and sanctioned by the priests; but Mrs. Percival would not hear of them; and, giving way to the impressions which had been kindled by all she had been told, expressed herself in strong terms against the people, the priests, the system, the doctrines, blending the most incongruous points, and, in her zeal against Rome, pulling down the greater part of the English Church also. Margaret sat by perfectly quiet; she no longer attempted excuses, even when Craven brought a charge of hypocrisy against every Romanist that had lived; protesting that the religion was a tissue of absurdities from beginning to end, and that no man in his senses ever believed it, however he might use it as a cloak for his secret purposes. With three persons like Craven, Mrs. Percival, and Miss Debrett, reasoning was hopeless; but Margaret's mind travelled swiftly to Henningsley, and whilst the fierce invectives against the Church of Rome met her ear, her thoughts were dwelling upon the exquisite repose, the grace, purity, and dignity of the Countess Novera, and the chastened, thoughtful earnestness of the Romish confessor. There was a pause when the storm of abuse had a little subsided, and Miss Debrett, her nerves highly agitated, and her imagination set at work, rose to say good-by. "I shall not have the young woman, you may be quite certain, my dear Mrs. Percival," she said. "I am so glad Craven has told me all this: I knew the Catholics were very wicked, but I had no idea they were such wretches. No, I will have nothing to do with them."

"What young woman?" inquired Margaret.

Miss Debrett repeated her history, allowing that as yet the fact of her being a Roman Catholic was only Staunton gossip; that she had come highly recommended, and that her appearance was very pleasing; that, in fact, she was the only person whom she had seen likely to suit her when Jenkins was gone.

"Then why give her up without inquiry?" said Mrs. Percival.

"I don't know, but I imagined you disapproved; that you would object to her being a Catholic."

"As to disapproving," replied Mrs. Percival, unable to refrain from a smile, "it is your business to do that. I certainly should not advise you to have her if she is one; but I would find that out first."

"Well, to be sure, it would be best. I am so glad I called: I never do manage to settle the right thing myself. But what shall

I do? I shall not see her again till next week, and she may be engaged by some one else before that time, and so I shall lose her entirely. Dear me, how unfortunate!"

Miss Debrett looked really distressed, and the merits of the rejected one rose distinctly to view. "She was so very tidy, so civil spoken, and she had been used to nursing, and was fond of cats."

"But is there no way of hearing of her?" asked Margaret.

"Oh yes, my love, a great many, if I could manage it. But she lives out of the town, and I don't think Jenkins will go and see about her for me, and I can't trust the woman of the house; and letters, you know, may be lost."

"Will it not do for me to go?" asked Margaret. "Is it any distance within a walk?"

"It is at Henningsley; the cottage close to the lodge, my dear. But I have not walked so far for years."

"But I have, every day of my life, nearly," said Margaret; "and it will be no trouble to me. Just tell me what I am to say, and the young woman shall call upon you this evening, if you like it."

"Not this evening, my love, because I shall be having my tea, and I have taken lately to going to bed early—not this evening, but to-morrow, in the morning, at twelve o'clock; then I can bring her over here for your mamma to see her. But, my dear Margaret, I don't know why I should give you so much trouble."

"It will be no trouble whatever," replied Margaret: "it is merely taking one road instead of another; and we were going out directly, were we not, Craven?"

Craven agreed, but hinted that "he did not feel safe in venturing into such a dangerous neighbourhood. He always thought of gunpowder plots when he heard of Romanists; and who knew but that they might suddenly find themselves blown up into the air, whilst they were talking to this civil-spoken damsel?"

"She was very civil spoken, to be sure," said Miss Debrett, with an air of thought; "but that was what I liked. Are you quite certain, my dear Mrs. Percival, that you would recommend her?"

"I would recommend you to inquire about her, by all means," replied Mrs. Percival, growing impatient. "Margaret will undertake the business, and, when she has seen the young woman, we can talk it over together."

"Thank you,—so like you,—so very kind; and you promised to let me know the moment you heard of dear Agatha and the Colonel?"

"Yes, Margaret shall send you a line; but very likely we shall not see them this evening. Agatha made a point of our not waiting at Ashington, because they might arrive late."

"Well, you are very patient and good, I must say; quite a pattern for all mothers. Margaret, dear, perhaps you will call on your return, and let me know what your opinion of the young woman is."

"If I do not call, I will write," said Margaret, knowing the length of time which a visit would involve.

Miss Debrett performed the usual salutations, and Craven looked on, drawing up his head, whilst a smile played round his mouth, as if he feared that the favour would be extended to him. He followed her, however, politely to the gate, congratulating her upon the happy prospect of a Romanist household; and assuring her that, whatever she might hear to the contrary, there was no doubt it was extremely dangerous to live under the same roof with any person who had ever been called a Papist.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

MARGARET had great difficulty in keeping her attention fixed upon anything which her brother said during the course of their long scrambling walk. Craven talked incessantly and amusingly, but Margaret desired silence, such silence as would give her time for reflection. There was none, however, till they had made a circuit of three miles, going through narrow lanes and ploughed fields, entangling themselves in brushwood, and clambering stiles. It was precisely the walk to prevent anything like a consecutive train of ideas, and Craven was so much the more pleased, for there was no occasion to renew or allude to disagreeable subjects. They passed over the hill at the back of Henningsley, and Margaret, with a longing, envious eye, watched the smoke curling up from the massive chimney, and thought how happy she could be if she were sitting, as she had been at the same hour on the previous day, in the bay-windowed drawing-room, with the Countess by her side, and Father Andrea standing with the volume of Milton in his hand, delighting her with the remarks and criticisms of a man who had studied deeply not merely classical and theological literature, but the lighter subjects of poetry and art. The enjoyment had been transient, and many months might elapse

before it could be experienced again. Margaret thought of this with the greater regret, from the contrast the preceding day's conversation presented to that in which she had lately taken a part. Sincere minds instinctively turn from what appears to them exaggeration and injustice. Margaret had discovered both in what had been said, and the effect was to give her a bias precisely in the opposite direction. There were many facts of a similar nature to those repeated by her brother, which she had often heard, and they had served to prejudice her strongly against the doctrines and the practices of the Romish Church. She had felt them so repugnant to her principles of right, that when first she knew the Countess she had tried to forget her as a Romanist. The extreme doctrines seemed unsuited to her. She had pictured to herself an ideal creed in harmony with the Countess's character, and which, by degrees, had assumed the form of reality. It might include deference to the Pope as the supreme head of the Church, confession and absolution, reverence for the saints and the blessed Virgin Mary, but little besides—certainly nothing approaching to idolatry or superstition, nothing which would sanction crime; nothing cruel or worldly. The assertions made by her brother had from this cause shocked her sense of justice: they appeared libellous. Her heart turned towards the religion which she considered to be calumniated, and her belief in the extent to which it had corrupted the doctrines of the primitive Church became less firm. If there were such misrepresentations and exaggerations in one instance, it was not unnatural to suppose there might be the same in all. These ideas floated in Margaret's mind as she walked leisurely through the copse which skirted the park, following the straight path, whilst the children ran amongst the trees with Craven, making the air ring with their merry laughter. They emerged from the wood into the high road, and here they were to separate. Margaret was to cross the fields in order to reach the cottage by the lodge, and Craven was to take the children home.

"You will be careful of them, Craven, now, won't you?" said Margaret, as Grace and Philip ran off by themselves. "Mamma will hold me responsible if they are led into any mischief."

"Take care of yourself, Margaret; you are in much greater danger than we are. Guy Fawkes and the Gunpowder Plot for ever."

He nodded a laughing farewell, and hurried Harriet away; and Margaret, opening a gate, pursued her path over the fields. The afternoon was lovely, and the bracing air seemed to refresh her

mind as well as her body. She breathed freely, and looked around her cheerfully, watching the varied shapes of the white clouds sailing slowly across the sky, marking the gradations of colour,—brown, and orange, and pale yellow,—which had just begun to tinge the foliage, and which harmonised richly with the deep crimson of the hawthorn berries on the old thorns, and the sombre red of the sandy banks, or stopping to gaze upon the purple shadows blending the distant hills, or to notice the perfect grouping of the trees, and to fix upon the spots in which, when the summer returned, they might form the best subject for a sketch. Margaret had not enjoyed a solitary walk for many days; she had almost forgotten what the luxury of solitude was, her life at home was so full of occupation and care for others. But the cottage was reached, and she was obliged to seek for admittance. She paused for an instant, unwilling to go amongst strangers,—even the poor,—and upon a matter of business. The reluctance was less strong than it used to be, when Margaret would have been as shy of making a new acquaintance amongst the villagers, as amongst persons of her own rank; for she had found by experience that there are few amongst the lower orders who do not like the visits of their superiors, when they are made cordially, and with the attention, it may even be called the politeness, which is their just due. But there was a little effort required to introduce herself, and as she stood at the gate looking at the remaining autumn flowers which still appeared gay and inviting, she heard a door open on the opposite side of the cottage, and directly afterwards a man walked rather quickly towards a stile which parted the garden from a field next the park. He stopped as he came there and looked round, and Margaret perceived that it was Father Andrea. He knew her at once, and bowed, but he did not come near, and Margaret had no excuse for addressing him. His presence there she considered a confirmation of the intelligence Miss Debrett had received. Father Andrea walked away, but very slowly, and Margaret knocked at the cottage-door. A faint voice bade her come in, and gently lifting the latch, she entered. A young girl, apparently in the last stage of consumption, was sitting, propped up by pillows, in an arm-chair by the fire; some work was on the table beside her, but there were no books, and no signs that she had been reading, though on a shelf in the corner lay a large Bible, and a number of tracts, besides two or three stray volumes, which had apparently been well used. The room was scrupulously neat, the walls were papered, the pewter dishes bright, and the china cups ranged in regular order in the

open closet. There were coloured prints also put up for ornament, and a couple of brass candlesticks, and a japanned snuffer-tray on the mantlepiece, besides a piece of carpet by the fire, and a footstool. But Margaret's attention was little attracted by these things: they satisfied her that there could be no actual poverty, and then she turned with interest to the sick girl. Her countenance was of a deadly paleness, except in the one hectic spot which marked the burning fever that consumed her. Her hands seemed scarcely more than the bones of a skeleton, so thin they were, and transparent, and her glassy eye wandered restlessly about as if seeking for the rest which suffering forbade her to find. It was this expression of restlessness which struck Margaret especially. The girl started when she entered, and her voice was not merely weak but frightened. She tried several times to look round to the door through which Father Andrea must have departed; and once or twice, as Margaret stopped in order not to fatigue her by questions, she observed that she seemed to be listening for something. All that she said at broken intervals, and interrupted by a short dry cough, confirmed what Miss Debrett had heard, except the fact of her religion. When this was mentioned, the girl's manner changed; her answers were short. She said that she had been bred up to the Church of England, and Mr. Stanley knew her very well. Her sister had been at service in a Baptist family; she generally went to the Baptist chapel, but she would not mind going to church.

"But perhaps your mother would object," said Margaret.

"No; mother does not care; she likes the Wesleyans; and Tom preaches there; but it is all the same."

The girl leant back in her chair, with a look of distress. Margaret repeated to herself, "It is all the same."

The words had struck upon a painful chord.

"Then you will tell your sister to call upon Miss Debrett to-morrow, at twelve o'clock."

"Yes, ma'am, certainly;" but there was no graciousness in the voice, and Margaret thought that perhaps she had been inconsiderate in troubling a person so ill.

"Is there anything I can do for you?" she said, with great kindness of tone and manner.

"Nothing, thank you, ma'am."

"I shall be glad to hear how you are," continued Margaret, her interest strangely excited by this unusual reserve. "Your name is what?"

"Rhoda—Rhoda Newbolt."

"Rhoda! an uncommon name," observed Margaret.

"They like Scripture names at the chapel," said the girl, and she was silent again.

"Well, then, Rhoda, I shall come another day, if I can, and see how you are going on; and perhaps you may be able to tell me something I can do for you."

"Thank you, ma'am," and Rhoda tried to rise from her chair to show the parting civilities. Margaret, however, insisted upon her remaining still, and after re-arranging the pillows which had fallen down, once more begged that the message to the sister might not be forgotten, and went away.

There was an oppressive weight upon her heart, when she again stepped forth into the open air; she seldom visited the cottage of the poor without it; a sense of powerlessness, uselessness; a thought that she was one — weak and helpless, and that the evils against which she would fain contend were legion. And she was a woman, a young woman, scarcely more than a girl; very ignorant, very sinful, wanting in judgment, experience, knowledge of the human heart. She could not govern herself, or teach the children aright, how then could she hope to do good amongst strangers — the poor, educated under totally different circumstances from any which had occurred to her? And what was her authority? If she spoke to them, how could she call upon them to listen? If she reproved them, what right had she to take upon herself the office of their judge? and if, as she knew by experience was frequently the case, they misled her by wilful falsehoods, how could she convict them? The sound of the church clock at Deering striking the hour awoke a different train of associations; yet not different, only directed from herself to the clergyman of her parish, — the good-natured rector, wasting his days in indolent comfort, when hundreds were perishing around him in the paths of vice, or wandering from his fold to seek instruction from self-appointed pastors. From the rector, there was but one step to the Church at whose altars he ministered. That particular case of spiritual destitution was not solitary; complaints were rising up everywhere. The history of the dense masses of the metropolis, and the manufacturing towns, was but a repetition of the same tale magnified a hundredfold; and if from them thought wandered to the vast colonies, where English laws and English customs were fast extirpating all traces of the original ownership of the lands, there was a picture of infidelity and unutterable wickedness which the mind shrank from contemplating. In the midst of this accumula-

tion of horrors where was the Church? Margaret was bewildered. She gazed in sadness upon the turrets of Henningsley, and thought that Father Andrea might be right. Where there was such fearful neglect, there could be no claim to superiority. The idea seemed as if by a sudden spell to have conjured up the person of whom she was thinking, for as she turned to pursue her walk homewards, she saw Father Andrea coming towards her. He was looking grave and severe as ever, but there was a gentle courteousness in his voice when he addressed her, which found an avenue at once to Margaret's heart. He apologised for having allowed her to pass before without speaking, but added, "that he was in much haste, and saw that she was upon an errand of charity."

"Business, not charity," replied Margaret. "I wished to ask a question for a friend, but I have never been in that cottage till to-day."

"Indeed! I imagined you were well acquainted with all the poor in the neighbourhood."

"That can scarcely be called a poor cottage," said Margaret; "there were many symptoms of unusual comfort."

"It may be poor in other respects," he replied; "and sickness will very frequently bring poverty in its train."

"Yes," said Margaret; "and that is an extreme case: one without hope, apparently."

"Without earthly hope," replied Father Andrea, emphatically; "but the Countess Novera has provided for all necessities to the best of her ability."

"There seemed little wanting except books," observed Margaret.

Father Andrea was silent for an instant.

"You saw none?" he inquired.

"None except the Bible, and the tracts on the shelf. Perhaps what she requires is to be talked to and read to."

"By the clergyman of the parish?" said Father Andrea.

Margaret was aware of a little confusion, but she hoped the Romish priest did not remark it.

"Mr. Stanley is a kind-hearted man," she said.

"So I have heard; he must have a large population to attend to."

"Fifteen hundred persons."

"Fifteen hundred souls," said Father Andrea, and there was silence again.

"But that one family can scarcely be considered to be under his care," continued Margaret; "they are Dissenters."

"And he has given them up, then?"

"No, I don't suppose that exactly; but they have left the Church."

"Or have been left by it?"

It was the first severe word the confessor had said, and Margaret could not be angry, for it was just.

"It is useless to attempt concealing the fact," she said, in a tone of candour for which Father Andrea was not prepared: "the parish is miserably neglected."

"You exaggerate," he replied, mildly. "Those whom Mr. Stanley cannot attend to, other persons can. You yourself, I have heard, are constant in your exertions."

"Me!" exclaimed Margaret, extremely pained; "Oh, no: who could say that? But if I did my utmost, who and what am I? Individuals have no power."

"Are you serious in saying so, Miss Percival?"

"I am serious in saying, and in feeling it," replied Margaret; "and I am a woman: teaching and guiding cannot be my province."

"Yet I have seen women working zealously, humbly, with the greatest success," observed the confessor; "not, indeed, undertaking the duties of men, but watching over the sick and the destitute; standing like ministering angels by the bedside of the dying; and winning souls to Christ by the saint-like purity of their lives. They were members of another communion: you would call them Romanists."

"The sisters of charity," replied Margaret. "Yes, I have read of them, and fancied that if one might dare to choose one's lot in life, theirs would be the safest and the holiest; but they do not act individually."

"No; they are members of a body, bound together by laws, kept under discipline. They act as parts of the Church, and the authority of the Church goes with their efforts."

"And they are guided and directed continually?" said Margaret, remembering her own weak endeavours.

"Yes, they have persons to whom they can apply in all cases of difficulty, and they are trained for the work by the system under which they live. But the Catholic Church has peculiar ideas on this subject, she does not contemplate doing good by individuals."

Margaret felt uncomfortable, almost unhappy; yet the very uneasiness she experienced seemed to urge her to continue the conversation.

"We have no institutions of the kind in the English Church," she said, "except what are called district visitors."

"And are they a body living together?"

"Oh, no, all separate; taken from different families, or rather offering themselves. But they have meetings at stated intervals."

"And a strict surveillance is kept over them, no doubt?" said Father Andrea.

Margaret could not help smiling, for she had lately received an account of the proceedings of a society in Staunton, and had been surprised at the freedom upon all points allowed to its different members.

"I believe," she said, "that in a large parish, a clergyman has so much to attend to, that the surveillance of which you speak is next to impossible. The visitors do what they can, and state any cases of particular distress, but they must be left very much to their own responsibility."

"They are persons of mature age, then, are they not?"

"Some may be, others are quite young girls; but it is impossible to be particular, because where there is very much to be done, and where few are willing to devote themselves, there can be no choice."

"The numbers of the sisters of charity are always full," said Father Andrea; "but they are not the only persons who are associated in bodies. The Catholic Church has also her houses of refuge for women who are left unprotected, or for any persons, male or female, who may wish to dedicate themselves to a stricter life of devotion, than is possible when mixing in the world."

"Monasteries and convents?" said Margaret. "We had such once in England, but they were greatly abused."

"So men say," replied Father Andrea; and, avoiding the question involved in Margaret's observation, he added, "you have missionary schemes, I think?"

Margaret said, "Yes;" but, conscious of her own ignorance, she shrank from the subject.

"Yet it is strange," continued the confessor, "how seldom we hear much of the working of the English establishment in the colonies."

"There are bishops in India, New Zealand, Australia, the Canadas," said Margaret.

"But comparatively lately established, I believe. I suppose the reason I know so little of what they have done, is because my attention has been principally turned to the operations of the Catholic Church, which has long provided for the necessities of the native and Christian population of these countries. Yet, perhaps, I am in error in attributing so little to Protestants, if I may include the sects who have worked with you."

Margaret was about to disclaim any such support, but she did not know upon what grounds she could base her objection. Father Andrea allowed a pause to follow; and then he said, rather suddenly, whilst a smile played upon his lips,—

"You have never, perhaps, read the account of the Jesuit missions in Paraguay."

"No, never," replied Margaret; and her suspicion was instantly aroused.

"I am not a member of the order," said the confessor, carelessly; "but I thought the subject might interest you."

"I am afraid I am rather prejudiced against the Jesuits," answered Margaret. "You know the name in England has passed into a proverb for double meaning."

"Yes, I know it well; but I should like you to judge for yourself. Will you let me give you a few facts?"

Margaret assented, and willingly; the mystery connected with the name of a Jesuit excited her utmost interest. Father Andrea noticed the sparkling of her eye, and the eagerness with which she listened, and he thought he might venture farther than he had at first intended. He began with the founder of the order himself, described his zeal, spirituality, devotedness to the cause he had espoused; from him he proceeded to Xavier, Lainez, Peter Faber, and their followers: he sketched the progress of their establishments in Europe, their rapid advancement, their marvellous power, their deep insight into the human heart, — ending by almost startling her with the details of their conversions in heathen countries, not by tens, nor hundreds, but by thousands. Margaret's brain grew confused. Father Andrea had lost his sobered, stern demeanour, and, animated by his subject, his words flowed eloquently. He made no pause, gave no time for questions and examinations, such as those with which Margaret had convinced her brother of exaggeration; his assertions were dogmatic, and Margaret could not dispute them; and when he had ended, she could say nothing in reply, for there was no room left for doubt.

Father Andrea saw his success, but there was no trace of the consciousness in his manner. He only apologised for having, as he feared, fatigued her with his subject, by saying that he hoped that its importance would plead his excuse. "A priest of the Catholic Church," he added, "cannot but feel an overwhelming interest in all which throws light upon his great duty of winning and training for heaven the souls of his fellow sinners."

As he spoke they stood before the front of Deering parsonage.

A man servant was at the gate, ordering angrily away a woman with two ragged children, who were begging for charity.

"My master gives nothing to trampers," said the man, in a surly voice. The woman looked ill, and mentioned that hers was a case of distress in the parish. The man again repeated his orders; and whilst she still lingered, Mr. Stanley rode up with two ladies; they were laughing heartily, and Mr. Stanley, taking out his watch, declared that they were very late. Margaret could not stop to know all that passed, but she heard the Rector tell his servant to give the woman a shilling, and bid her call to-morrow. This might be right, or it might not; she was not the person to judge; but a look, it almost amounted to a contemptuous expression, was visible on Father Andrea's face.

"I must leave you here," he said, "but I had nearly forgotten the subject which I most wished to name. You will, I think, pardon me for troubling you with a secret, in which the comfort of another person is concerned."

Margaret looked at him in wonder.

"It may not seem to you a very important one," he continued, "but that poor girl—had you heard any report about her before you saw her?"

"I was told that she was a Romanist," replied Margaret.

"A Catholic; yes, you are right; she is one, so are many of the people on the Henningsley estate. But she belongs to a family where her religion is not merely disliked, but hated. My visits are necessarily rare; to-day I knew that she was alone, and I had the opportunity of a short conversation with her. You will do me the favour not to mention that you met me."

Margaret promised readily, and Father Andrea thanked her with much warmth of manner. As they parted he said,—

"The Countess will see you again before she goes, of course, and we may look forward, I hope, to renewing our acquaintance after the winter."

Margaret agreed to visit Henningsley if possible in a few days, and then retraced her steps home, with a mixture of irritation at the style of the conversation, sorrow at the projected separation, and secret regret that she should probably have so few opportunities of increasing her uneasiness, by another walk with the Romish priest.

When Margaret reached home, she found her mother in a state of great excitement, having just received a note from Agatha, written from Ashington. Mrs. Percival was eager to go there at once, but it was late. Dr. Percival was impatient for his dinner,

and reminded her that Agatha particularly said that she should not expect to see any of them.

"Let them have a quiet evening to themselves, Julia," he said, "they must be tired; besides, I don't see why my house is to be put into confusion to-night."

"There will be no confusion, my dear; Margaret will be at home, and you don't consider how anxious I must be."

"But I suppose Margaret will be wanting to go too: women are so restless. No, no, leave it to-night."

Mrs. Percival looked at Margaret, expecting to hear her entreaties seconded; but Margaret, standing by the fire, listened with an air of indifference, which was scarcely disturbed by her mother's exclamation of—

"My love, what is the matter? you seem not to care about Agatha!"

"Me! oh yes, mamma; we can go the first thing to-morrow. It must be time to dress for dinner now;" and Margaret hastened away.

Not care for Agatha! yes, Margaret did care more truly and more kindly than her mother; but the affection was not elicited at that instant, even by the prospect of their meeting. Father Andrea's words were rankling in her breast, and Father Andrea's voice and manner were haunting her memory. So zealous, so reverent, so confident of his own faith, and the truth of his Church. Could he be in error? Falsehood can tempt us in any shape, even by appealing to our virtues; and charity and humility whispered to Margaret, that where so much was saintly in feeling, there could be little wrong in doctrine or practice. She did not think now, that she would take her prayer-book to Henningsley and teach the Countess to admire it; rather she said within herself, that she would inquire more into the rites and services of the Romish Church; she would see what there was in it which could so powerfully influence the mind; she would endeavour to discover whether the Countess really did believe all the points which she had been accustomed to condemn; that is, she would inquire when the Countess returned in the spring or summer. For the present, she would cherish her remembrance as the most beautiful vision of outward grace and inward purity which had ever yet been presented to her view, and think of Father Andrea as the representative of all that a holy, devoted servant of God, might and ought to be. And Mr. Sutherland — how was he to be considered in comparison? Was he to be Father Andrea's equal? Self-denying, humble-minded, sincere, zealous — Margaret had hitherto

believed that no one could be like him; but there was one thing wanting: no mystery surrounded Mr. Sutherland. All that he did, and said, appeared open as the day. His dress, and manner, and actions were perfectly simple; so much so, that it was only after long acquaintance that any accurate idea could be formed of the depth of his mind. But Father Andrea, at first sight, bore the stamp of a man distinguished from the ordinary world. Something there might be in his dress, but there was much more in his deep sonorous voice, his stern cast of countenance, his words, now uttered hastily, as if the outpouring of a spirit eager to give vent to its fulness of thought; and then checked, and mastered by a powerful will. And Father Andrea wrought upon Margaret's imagination, as belonging to a different communion, and being governed by laws, which for ages had ruled with despotic sway over nations and characters of every different class.

Mr. Sutherland was one of a body of whom Margaret believed she knew all that could be told. They were excluded from ordinary vocations, but there was no secrecy in their internal government; no peculiarity in their mode of living. Of their spiritual authority she had thought but little; and since her conversations with Father Andrea it had sunk in her estimation. Few minds, certainly few young minds, can resist the influence of a doubt implied without hesitation; and it required more faith than Margaret then possessed, to believe that the rector of Deering could lay claim to any particular respect, by virtue of an office which he neglected to fulfil. Mr. Sutherland was indeed very different; but even he did not possess the distinctive marks which rendered Father Andrea an object of so much reverence. Margaret could not but respect and love him; but she had no hesitation in arguing with and differing from him. Before the mysterious character of the Romish priest, she felt that her whole soul would bow in acknowledgment of inferiority, and in the act of humiliation her spirit would find repose. The right of private judgment is much spoken of, and supposed to be a great privilege; but there are not many, especially amongst women, who find it so. Their very physical weakness makes them willing to be governed, especially in questions of religion; and it is in this way that a power which comes before them, speaking authoritatively and requiring unreserved submission, seizes upon their imagination, and easily triumphs over their reason. Superiority of intellect is no safeguard; for the minds which think the most, have the greatest perception of the awfulness and mysteriousness of life, and the greatest longing for rest.

A visible, infallible guide, is to some the only refuge from the changes, the unceasing fluctuations of opinion, which agitate them when they venture forth into the unfathomable ocean of perplexity lying beyond the actual region of sight. So men can live engrossed in earthly cares, and die without more than a passing wish to know that which shall follow after; but let the eye be opened to the vanity of the things of time, and the intense longing to realise the hereafter of eternity will be quieted only by the humble spirit of faith, which, trusting in the mercy of God, is satisfied with that which he has plainly revealed; or by speculations which enter into the secrets of the Almighty, and seek to determine the condition of the soul in the intermediate state. Either a childlike faith, or a supposed certainty, they must have, who hope to cultivate their reason, and purify their hearts, and yet know peace. But it is mercifully ordered, that the needs of our animal nature, and the common requirements of society, step in to prevent too great an exercise of thought. If Margaret had been left to herself, she would have spent the remainder of the evening in solitude, trying to recall all that Father Andrea had said, and perhaps considering how Mr. Sutherland would have answered; or raising questions which by her own knowledge she would not have been able to answer. Instead of this, she was obliged to go down stairs and endeavour to enter into conversation. She was called upon afterwards by Harriet to look over some exercises, and obliged to prepare some questions in history for Grace to answer the next day; and after tea Craven insisted upon having a musical evening, and beginning early; and when the clock struck ten, Margaret had not been at liberty to follow her own inclinations for one quarter of an hour. There was a little fretfulness in her mind when she went to bed; a thought that every one else had been amused or instructed at her expense. But she little knew how great a blessing this constant occupation, this unceasing demand upon her self-denial really was. Left to herself, and to her own pursuits, Margaret would have become visionary, and indolent, and indulged in doubts which could only end in fatal error. The practical duties, even the common necessities, the eating, drinking, and sleeping, which could not be omitted, were of incalculable use to her. They served as checks and balances to a vivid, but as yet an ill-regulated imagination.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE grounds of Ashington were looking lovely when Agatha descended to the breakfast-room, the first morning after taking possession of her new home. One less easily captivated by outward beauty, might well have felt a glow of exultation at the thought of being the mistress of such a place, and Agatha's face fully expressed her satisfaction. She was alone, and there was nothing at the instant to remind her of the price at which she had purchased her worldly elevation. The future spread before her glittering and unchangeable ; her lot in life was fixed, and fixed for the enjoyment of all the luxury which wealth could obtain. But a voice was heard in the hall, and Agatha started from a brilliant reverie. The countenance of her husband was not cloudless like her own. He had missed some articles of his dressing apparatus, and had been abusing his valet for carelessness.

"I shall turn him off, Agatha," he said, rather moodily, drawing his chair to the table.

"I doubt if you will find any one to suit you better," she replied. "He was very attentive when we were travelling."

"He might have been attentive to you, my dear, but he was not to me. I had to complain of him every day."

Agatha had already learnt that there was no surer way of increasing Colonel Clive's annoyance, than by taking the part of any one with whom he found fault. She made no reply, and the breakfast proceeded without much attempt at conversation; Agatha thought a little of the description which she had read in novels of the conduct of husbands and wives under similar circumstances ; but the comparison which followed was not satisfactory, and she proceeded to other contemplations. Colonel Clive, however, never was possessed by any notion without wearing it threadbare ; and after a long pause he again exclaimed, —

"I shall turn him off, Agatha."

"If you do," answered Agatha, "you had better let me ask mamma to recommend you another man."

"No, I think my sister is the best person to consult."

"I don't see why that should be," observed Agatha, with a slight tone of pique.

Colonel Clive relapsed into abstraction, though not sufficiently so to prevent his making a hearty breakfast.

"My sister will be here this morning, and I shall talk to her," he observed, bursting forth suddenly again. Agatha could be indifferent to much which might have disturbed other tempers, but interference was unendurable. "I really wish," she said, "that I might be allowed to have a voice in the management of the household."

"He is the most lazy, sulky fellow in existence," continued the Colonel, regardless of the remark. "I shall turn him off; yes, I shall certainly turn him off."

"Mamma will be sure to know some one to take his place," replied Agatha; "I can ask her when I see her."

"I don't wish you to ask any one, my dear. Leave me, if you please, to manage my own affairs."

"That butler of your sister's is detestable," pursued Agatha; "all but an idiot."

"My sister will be here in the course of the day," said the Colonel; "she will dine here, and then I shall describe the sort of person I want."

"Mamma, and papa, and Craven, and Margaret, will be here, too," observed Agatha. "I don't think your sister will care to meet a family party."

"I shall beg her to come, at all events. I can't be bored with this man any longer."

Agatha took refuge in silence and hot rolls; and the servant entering with letters and a newspaper, the subject was dropped. But it was not forgotten by one at least. Agatha's jealousy of Mrs. St. Aubyn's influence had been aroused before her marriage, and had caused a decided coolness, veiled under a mask of politeness. The question of the man-servant was really not of much consequence to her, for Mrs. St. Aubyn might be just as able to recommend a good one as Mrs. Percival; but Agatha could not, and would not brook, what seemed an invasion of her rights. There was a quiet perverseness in her manner the whole of the morning, remarkably irritating to a fretful, impatient man; and before the arrival of the party from the Grove, the incipient feud had twice broken out into open violence of temper on Colonel Clive's part. The hall bell rang in the midst of the last altercation. The Colonel left the room, uttering an exclamation very far from gentle; and Agatha smoothed her brow, and forced her mouth into a smile, and went to greet her mother and Margaret. It was a proud moment for Mrs. Percival. She saw her daughter the wife of a man of fortune and family, lovely in feature, elegant in dress, soft and affectionate in manner to herself, and apparently

full of cheerfulness and contentment. No fondness could have desired anything beyond; at least, no such fondness as Mrs. Percival's. Margaret looked at her sister with surprise. She had fancied that Agatha must appear in some way different; that she would look or speak so as to betray something either of deeper happiness or sorrow. But Agatha was scarcely in any way altered. She smiled brightly, spoke cheerfully, inquired with particular interest about the Grove, and the children, and her friends; — one circumstance only was remarkable; she did not mention her husband. They walked into the garden: Margaret thought she saw Colonel Clive at a distance; but if he were there, Agatha avoided him. Margaret grew annoyed and suspicious; this company manner was not what she had anticipated. Mrs. Percival asked several times for "the dear Colonel," but Agatha professed ignorance of his movements.

"He had his own peculiar ways of occupying himself," she said, with a shade of sarcasm in the tone, which did not escape Margaret's watchfulness.

"Well! we shall see him at dinner," observed Mrs. Percival. "We shall all come, my love, since you wish it so much; and I thought of bringing Harriet too, because then I can better leave the little ones with Baker."

At that instant, they turned the corner of a walk, and came suddenly upon Colonel Clive. There was no retreat — Agatha glanced at her husband, then at Margaret, to discover how much of the morning's dispute was likely to be visible; and was satisfied that Mrs. Percival's eagerness and cordiality would compel the Colonel to relax. A feeling of greater ease was stealing over the party. Agatha thought she might venture a step towards the attainment of her desired object, her own way. She kept her mother back and mentioned their wish, theirs she called it, not the Colonel's, of having another man-servant; but Colonel Clive heard the words, and his displeasure burst forth — to Mrs. Percival's dismay, and Margaret's shame and sorrow. Agatha stood unmoved, a scornful smile curling her lip; and when the torrent of words was ended, she begged that she might be allowed to pass, and entered the house. After the lapse of a few minutes, she returned to the drawing-room; Colonel Clive was still there, fretting and fuming. Agatha took up her work, and addressed her mother, and Margaret almost believed she must be in good humour; but the storm which for a moment gathered on her brow, when, unannounced and apparently unexpected, Mrs. St. Aubyn entered, was no sign of amiability. Yet even then she

was polite, perfectly so; the only fault that could be found with her was, that the politeness was uncalled for. Mrs. St. Aubyn's manner was that of a person at home. In her brother's house it was natural that it should be. Agatha's was carefully ceremonious. Colonel Clive was a little soothed by his sister's presence, and Margaret trusted that he would not again allude to the unpleasant subject. The question, however, came at last. — "Do you know of a good man-servant?" Agatha did not appear to listen whilst Mrs. St. Aubyn told of the two or three who, as is always the case with good servants, might have been had some weeks before; but when, as she continued, Colonel Clive vacantly turned over the pages of a handsome book of prints, in the awkward way which marks a person who does not care for such things, Agatha threw down her work, broke off a conversation with her mother, and silently taking the book from her husband's hand, pointed to the thumb-marks. Margaret, in consternation, started up, saying that she must go, if her mother did not care. At the instant she did not know what reason to give for her sudden haste; but any excuse seemed desirable to avert the wrath of the colonel's fiery eyes; and she ran through the list of her day's occupations, not allowing a pause for any one to interrupt her. Mrs. Percival looked astonished, but she was not inclined to object, though, for herself, she said, she should stay there, as she had many things to say to dear Agatha. Margaret hoped that she might be allowed to walk home alone; but Mrs. St. Aubyn having declined the invitation to dinner, on the plea that she had already engaged the Countess Novera's young Italian friend to spend the day with her, proposed that Margaret should accompany her in the carriage. Margaret's heart was too heavy to desire any such society, but she was obliged to agree; and after a cold unsatisfactory parting from Agatha, and a promise to return with her father, Craven, and Harriet, by dinner time, she departed.

"And this is Agatha's happiness!" she said to herself, as the carriage drove off. How the aspect of all external was changed, even in that short interview. Margaret could have understood her sister's hopes of enjoyment in the morning, when she looked upon the beautiful place of which she was the mistress; but now she only sorrowed over her delusion. Well might Mr. Sutherland have prophesied of the suffering which is necessary to root out of the heart a worldly selfishness. But Margaret could not then give way to painful anticipations, for Mrs. St. Aubyn demanded her

attention. The conversation began; and almost the first observation which was made completed Margaret's depression.

"So we shall lose our friends at Henningsley, Margaret, almost immediately. Lucia tells me they go at the end of the week."

The words were rather a shock, for Margaret had in her own mind made the fortnight at least a month.

"I dare say you will not care as much as I do," continued Mrs. St. Aubyn, observing her silence; but I shall miss that pretty little Italian girl extremely, and she is becoming quite fond of me."

Margaret remarked that she looked quick, and Mrs. St. Aubyn, immediately launched out more warmly into her praise, adding, "my regard for the Countess has been increased by her. The friendship between the two is really quite romantic."

Again Margaret felt as if something had struck her; the sensation was such as she imagined jealousy to produce, but she was not aware that jealousy was in her disposition. She wished to hear more, and yet disliked the sound of the Countess's name from Mrs. St. Aubyn's lips. She was spared many more communications, however, for Mrs. St. Aubyn desired to alight at the entrance of the town, and Margaret was sent home alone. The house looked dreary when she entered it; without life or interest; full of duties and no pleasures. And the duties so trifling! so widely different from the animating employments which Father Andrea had portrayed when describing the life of a missionary of the Romish Church, labouring in a foreign land, devoting himself to his grand work, and finding in it sufficient to satisfy all his desires. Margaret was sure that, in such a cause, she could labour likewise. Privation would be no hardship, loneliness would scarcely be suffering. For a great trial, a great spirit would of necessity be aroused; but for a trifling one of no consequence—under the influence of a passing discontent, Margaret made a grievous error. How can any trials be trifling? For beings born for eternity, how can any event which brings them nearer, even in the most remote degree, to endless happiness or misery, be thought to be of no consequence?

CHAPTER XXX.

Mrs. St. Aubyn was correct in her report, that the Countess would leave Henningsley in a few days. Lady Anstruther had written to request that she would without fail join her in London, and travel with her into Devonshire. There was not one of the little party who had not some cause to regret the arrangement. Lucia lamented openly that she should be separated from her kind friend Mrs. St. Aubyn; the Countess thought in private of Margaret; and Father Andrea tried to persuade himself that it would be better to allow his words to take root, and work out their natural effect, than to be actually on the spot, under the temptation to speak unguardedly, and perhaps defeat his own object. Yet he could not entirely banish regret—the case seemed so hopeful. Margaret was humble-minded, and candid; there seemed no prejudices standing in his way; and perhaps, during his absence, other subjects might arise to occupy her mind, or other friends might be found to supplant the Countess in her affections. Father Andrea feared that Margaret might be versatile, for it was rather a characteristic of her sex. Even the Countess, he thought, might have been so under different circumstances; and Lucia, he saw, was already losing something of the stability which had formerly marked her character. For her sake, he was not sorry that they were to remove from Henningsley. Beatrice was now made a sharer in all the confessor's thoughts regarding Margaret. He repeated to her the conversation which she had held when they last met, and expressed his wonder that any one aware, as she seemed to be, of the deficiencies of her own Church, should yet retain an attachment for it.

"Still it is but early prejudice," he said; "and I think her sympathies would soon be enlisted on our side. Have you lent her any books?"

"No, Father," replied the Countess. "I would take no such step without your sanction; and you have warned me repeatedly to be cautious."

"It is well, my daughter: yet I should have been glad to know how far she is acquainted with the writings of our divines. Those of them, I mean, in whom she would find the least to startle her present belief. Massillon, Bourdaloue, Fénélon, Pascal, Thomas à Kempis, might all be read without what she would consider danger. You may try her. Mark your favourite passages, and

leave the volumes with her. Now that you have resolved to propose a correspondence, you will be able to gain her opinions without difficulty."

"You have not seen the poor girl at the Lodge to-day, Father, I suppose," said the Countess.

"No; she is carefully watched. I imagine my visit must have been perceived the other day; but it was a very satisfactory one. Her belief is settled; and whether she live or die, I have no doubt that she will continue faithful to the true Church."

"Poor young creature!" exclaimed the Countess; "and to be obliged to conceal so much, and listen to the errors of those deluded people! Yes, it will indeed be a comfort to know that Miss Percival is acquainted with her state, and is watching over her."

"It will be for the good of both," replied Father Andrea. "When the soul is hanging on the brink of another world, its thoughts become awful prophecies."

"And she will hearken to them!" exclaimed the Countess, a smile of hope breaking over her face. "Father, I see now how deep your meaning is."

"Rhoda will unconsciously work for us whilst we are away," said the Father. "I shall make her aware that Miss Percival has heard her history, and that she may confide in her; and she will pour forth to her the feelings which are now pent up in her own breast."

"And Miss Percival will not resist," replied the Countess. "When she sees the peace which is bestowed upon those who die in the communion of the true Church, she will long for it likewise. I have heard that at such seasons Protestants are harassed by fearful doubts."

Father Andrea for a moment covered his face with his hand. Perhaps a thought of the unknown sufferings of purgatory might have induced him to doubt of the fulness of that repose which the Countess had supposed would be granted to the last hours of a Romanist. "At any rate," he said, looking up again, "it is clearly our duty to provide for the comfort of the sick girl; and not to neglect the opportunity of leading Miss Percival to the truth. Shall you see her again before you go?"

"I had thought of doing so, Father, though the time is short: but I fear our interview is not likely to be private."

"Then do not offer her the books, or mention Rhoda's name," said Father Andrea. "It is above all things necessary that her family should not take alarm. You may write from London, which will answer every purpose."

The Countess looked grave at the mention of London.

"I shall leave all my interest behind me," she said. "Whether I am in London, or Devonshire, or elsewhere, I shall find nothing to atone for the absence of Margaret Percival; and I think, Father, that she has something of the same feeling for me."

"It could not be otherwise, my daughter," replied the priest, and he looked at her affectionately. But a change came over his countenance. It was a lovely face upon which he gazed; and the traces of a lofty, unworldly spirit were to be read in its pure and dignified expression. Yet there were lines and hues, soft and beautiful in themselves, and throwing an air of ethereal grace over the features of the Countess, which Father Andrea could never dwell upon and smile.

"There is a chilling wind to-day," he said: "you will remember, my daughter, that we are not in Italy."

The Countess saw his fears, but she had no thought for herself, and playfully insisted that she must go the round of her tenants, to bid them good-bye.

"You know, Father, they are not all to be placed like Rhoda under Miss Percival's care."

"No, and therefore I would fain preserve the health of her who is their natural guardian, that when the summer returns, she may return also to watch over them." Beatrice, however, objected to this apparent unkindness, and Father Andrea's will was overruled.

Margaret and the Countess did not meet again before Henningsley was left. On returning the following day from paying a visit, Margaret was told that the Countess Novera had called during her absence and left a note and a parcel. She took the note with a foreboding of what it would contain. It was, indeed, a farewell, hurried but affectionate. Lady Anstruther's plans, the Countess said, were so settled that she was compelled to join her immediately; and she could only look forward to the hope that when the winter months were over, she might again have an opportunity of renewing an acquaintance which had given her the greatest pleasure that she had yet enjoyed in England. In the meantime she entreated Margaret not to forget that they had known each other; to think of her in her walks and conversations and studies, as Beatrice herself must ever remember her; and, if possible, to prove that the regard which had sprung up in her own breast was reciprocated, by perusing the volumes which were enclosed. "They have been to me," she added, "comfort in sorrow, and support in weakness; and they will tell you more of

the foundation of the hopes upon which I have long built my happiness, than I could ever explain in my own words." Sadness filled Margaret's heart when she read the concluding sentence in which the Countess prayed that God would bless her and make known to her his truth. The expression was too solemn for any ordinary parting. A light dawned upon her mind, and showed her that Beatrice grieved over what she believed to be her errors. Some months before Margaret might have smiled at such an anxiety, but now she could not. It was entertained by a person so superior to herself in devotedness to religion, that it assumed the form of an accusation. Margaret's virtues again became her temptation, and her candid confession that she was not holy like the Countess Novera, cast a slur over the Church in which she had been educated. So difficult it is to separate ourselves from the principles by which we profess to act; to condemn our own deficiencies without throwing a stigma upon the faith which is, in itself, sufficient to make us saints. Margaret opened the parcel accompanying the note, and saw that it contained a few volumes of Massillon, and Bourdaloue's sermons, extracts from the writings of Fénélon, made in the Countess's handwriting, and the "Pensées de Pascal." Even Mr. Sutherland could not object to these books, they were in common use amongst members of the English Church. And yet she did not wish to mention that she had received them, though an unfinished letter to her uncle lay on the desk before her. He might allow that there was no harm in the books themselves, but he might fancy that if the Countess once began to lend books, she would not stop at those which were unexceptionable. He was likely to be distrustful also of her strength, though no idea could be more absurd. In fact there could be no danger. The Countess might wish that they agreed, and very naturally; Margaret wished the same; but there were no attempts at conversion, for it was well known that the orthodoxy of Pascal and Fénélon was considered doubtful by very strict Romanists.

As Mr. Sutherland would be likely to misinterpret, Margaret persuaded herself that he ought not to be put to the trial. If he objected, she would have a difficulty in going against him, and it would involve the necessity of drawing back and appearing unkind to the Countess. This was at the root of Margaret's determination; her affections were touched, and she suffered them to mislead her, still without a thought of harm. Her mother, she knew, would in no wise share Mr. Sutherland's scruples. To her it would be sufficient to say, that the Countess had lent her some French sermons. Mrs. Percival was too well pleased at the acquaintance to

be likely to object to anything which promised its continuance. The books were put away to be studied at leisure; the note was re-read, not once, nor twice, but many times; and then Margaret sat down to finish her letter. She had been describing her meeting with Agatha, and had written freely whatever came uppermost in her thoughts. But something now had chilled the freedom —the inclination to write was over; and as the letter was not intended to be sent on that day, Margaret shut her desk, and took a volume of Massillon instead. The style of writing was extremely attractive, and the most beautiful passages were marked by pencil lines. They were mostly those which spoke of the burden of sin, the oppression of sorrow, and deadness to the world. In one or two places Beatrice had written an observation, applying what was said to herself, and Margaret felt that she was reading the revelation of her mind. Through the medium of another's words, and by the power of the most eloquent language, she was learning to penetrate the depths of the Countess's heart. Margaret read till the dinner-bell rang, and when dinner was over seized with avidity upon a few leisure moments, to return again to the study, not of Massillon's exhortations, but of the Countess Novera's character. Beatrice would have been shocked, if she had known the reverence to which her simple obedience to Father Andrea's wishes had given rise. Some parts she had marked because they explained what she wished to be; others because they suited some favourite train of ideas; others because they were in themselves beautiful. But Margaret read them all as the actual portrait of a human being—of a Romanist. She had never seemed to know so much of any one, not even of her uncle; and when forced at length to return to the drawing-room, no one in the circle of her friends appeared worthy of admiration, when compared with the ideal which she had formed of the Countess Novera.

The succeeding day Margaret sat in the dull school-room, looking out upon the garden, and pursued her course of occupation with a wandering eye, and a vacant ear. Carts, and waggons, and the rumbling of a stage-coach were heard at a distance; and, now and then, the quick rattle of a lighter vehicle. Margaret sent Harriet to the drawing-room to practise, and made the little ones repeat their lessons in a low tone. With all her watchfulness, she knew that she was likely to miss the moment of the Countess's passing. To be certain that she was gone, could only give her pain; yet, with an ingenious self-torture, she allowed her mind to be distracted, and scarcely struggled against her inattention. A deeper roll, as of a heavy carriage, at last caught her

notice; she threw down the children's books, and ran into the dining-room. It opened upon the front of the house, but shrubs and palings screened it from the road. Margaret had a glimpse of the postilions — the footman — the Countess's maid. The carriage was moving quickly — in a moment it had reached the gate — its cumbrous un-English form was just visible — and then it was gone; leaving on Margaret's mind nothing but a heavy sense of disappointment and loneliness, and a fancy that she had indistinctly seen a face of exquisite sweetness gazing earnestly from the window.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE romance of Margaret's daily life was now over. It was in vain to look at the turrets of Henningsley and picture the Countess's occupations; it was useless to turn from the insipidity of her home duties to the hour of relief which awaited her in her next visit: employment, unexciting and often distasteful, was before her, and it was to be carried through as best it might, with little external to animate or refresh her. It seemed hard that it should be so; that she should be thus left to herself, when domestic cares were evidently drawing nearer, and she had just begun to taste the enjoyment of affection and congeniality in a person of her own sex, living in her own neighbourhood. Margaret was inclined at first to murmur, but her practical habits saved her as they had often done before. On the very afternoon of the Countess's departure, Mrs. Percival having taken the children out, she was at liberty to make a few parish visits, and the real grievances of the poor were a striking sermon against discontent. Her trials scarcely deserved the name in comparison of theirs. All that was needed to make them light was that they should be borne in a right spirit, as if besides endeavouring to tone her mind by prayer and meditation, she could look at some of her anxieties and grapple with them, she knew that her failing energy would be strengthened. Craven's secret was that which most oppressed her. He had professed his determination of leaving them directly, notwithstanding that his leave of absence was not expired. This was in accordance with his selfishness, though he gave very plausible reasons for it, and said that he wished to visit a friend in town. Margaret saw that the excuse was a mere pretence; his home fretted him. He had amused

himself sufficiently with laughing at Colonel Clive, and had jested with Agatha until she grew angry; and now he had nothing left to assist in keeping up his spirits, for he could not bear to be alone with Margaret; she never gave him reason to suppose that she intended to refer to the subject of his debts, still less that she thought of retracting her promise; but he lived in constant fear of it, and he would give Margaret no opportunity of inducing him to be serious. This was a most uncomfortable position for her, when it seemed as if she ought to have some influence over him. His candour, and his professed affection, indicated that he had more regard for her than for any one else, and a responsibility seemed attached to her in consequence. But talking was out of the question. When he had left them she thought that she would write. Yet how could writing be of use? his answers must be public. If Mrs. Percival once found that a correspondence was kept up from which she was excluded, she would either complain, and distress herself, and suspect, till the happiness of the whole family was destroyed, or else forbid it entirely. She placed no confidence in her children, and yet her favourite theory—a very high sounding one—was, that their confidence ought to be given in an unlimited degree to her. As a mother, she believed that she had a right to exact it; and from their infancy she had done so, by forcing them to tell her whatever was passing, by never allowing them to write or receive letters which were not subjected to her inspection, by checking everything like unrestrained intercourse with their companions, in the vain hope that by thus closing the outlets to their feelings they would return back to her. Return indeed they did, but it was to her children's own breasts, there to be fostered without restraint, whilst hidden by a cold propriety, which without any intentional deception entirely concealed their real dispositions. No mother could be more ignorant of what her children really were than Mrs. Percival, whilst at the same time no mother could have had a more accurate knowledge of all that apparently went on amongst them. When they grew up this species of supervision was of necessity checked in its outward form, but the spirit still remained. Margaret was not commanded to show her letters, but it was expected that she should do so; and this not from curiosity, for common notes were allowed to pass without much inquiry, but from a wish on Mrs. Percival's part to enter into her children's minds. She was even more particular in their correspondence with each other than with indifferent persons, and from this cause it would be next to impossible for Margaret to be of use to Craven. She considered

whether it would be well to ask as a favour that she might keep his letters private; but against this there was the fact that, in a few days, the state of his affairs must be made known, and if she then proposed this for the first time it would very naturally make her mother anxious. There might be other ways — deceitful ones; but Margaret could not do evil that good might come. She tried rather to have faith that God would guard him from evil. It was a more safe rock to build upon than her own efforts. And so Craven departed, and Margaret said "Good-bye" to him with a cheerful smile, and a whispered but most earnest request that he would remember his promise, which was answered in a similar tone, by an injunction to manage matters carefully, and get as much out of his "excellency" as she could. Margaret was weary of his indifference and folly. She was thankful that he was gone, though it brought the dreaded moment near when she must explain everything to her father. Colonel Clive and Agatha were to dine with them, and it seemed a reason for delay. But when Margaret began to examine she found that it was no reason at all. She could not on any other day talk to her father at dinner, or in the evening when her mother was present; the only time was quite late; and the visitors would not interfere with this, because Colonel Clive always went away at ten o'clock, unless he was at a regular party. This was not a pleasant discovery to Margaret. She was as great a coward as the rest of the world with regard to family explosions, and had just the same inclination to procrastinate, and make false excuses to avoid doing what was disagreeable; but she was accustomed to tutor herself in little every-day incidents; fetching her work directly she knew that it ought to be had; preparing for a walk as soon as the proper time arrived; giving up an interesting book whenever a superior duty claimed her attention; and now this same habit prevented her from postponing the declaration of Craven's extravagance for a single day. It was strange how greatly the difficulty seemed lessened even by the very resolution to face it. The moment Margaret had made up her mind that on that evening, as soon as her mother was gone to bed, she would tell her father everything, a new spirit seemed to pervade her. Every now and then her heart beat rather fast, and she was a little abstracted in her manner during the evening; but upon the whole she was tranquil and unconcerned to a degree which before she could not have conceived. Life is to us all like a succession of shower-baths. Some shiver and tremble, and holding in their hands the fatal string, look round for a means of escape, and give a slight pull, and feel the first misery of the

shock, and then in fear give way, and shiver, and look, and gently pull again, and at last leave the scene of their trial, chilled and comfortless, and uninvigorated; and others rouse up their energies to face the seeming suffering, and after the first alarm is over, find that they have attained a lasting good at the expense of a momentary evil, for good that must be which at whatever price strengthens our powers of self-command, and gives us moral courage. The evening was not long, for they dined late; but it was very stupid. Family parties, when persons do not live in the same house, can scarcely fail to be so, unless all can be either quite at home, or quite visitors. Colonel Clive could be neither. He required amusement, and Mrs. Percival thought it right that he should have it, and accordingly books were forbidden when he was present. He did not care for music, but he did now and then fancy a game of backgammon, and Margaret played with him, whilst Agatha and her mother sat by and tried to talk. The only individual at his ease was Dr. Percival, who slept as usual. Margaret observed her sister's manner, and thought she was out of spirits. She conversed, if that could be called conversation, which consisted only in short replies to Mrs. Percival's questions as to whom she had seen during the day. Her husband did not address any observations to her, and looked sulky; and an outbreak of impatience when he had lost two games, made Margaret think that the storm might have been gathering some time previously. If Agatha's anger was in any way excited against him, she contrived, however, to hide it with a very good grace. The only thing remarkable in her manner was the haste with which she put up her work, when she was sharply reminded by the Colonel that the clock had struck ten, whilst in a fretful voice she assured him that she should be ready in a very few minutes. Margaret gained some insight into the causes of this ill humour when she inquired whether Colonel Clive meant to go to London the next week, and was told, "No; that he had a sudden whim to stay at home: he had taken it into his head that farming would be a good occupation." Agatha's tone was that of annoyance; but she saw the feeling which she was betraying, and added, "It certainly is desirable for a country gentleman."

Margaret was the last person to whom Agatha would willingly have acknowledged that she looked forward to her husband's absence as a relief, and had urged it upon him so strongly as to arouse his contradictory temper, and give rise to a not very gentle matrimonial quarrel.

The hall door was closed; the night candles were brought;

Mrs. Percival bade Margaret go to bed, and prepared to do the same. But the preparations took a long time, and Margaret was obliged to wait for at least twenty minutes in her own room, until she heard her mother enter her chamber, and ring the bell for her maid, and then, her heart beating quickly and faintly, she proceeded again to the drawing-room. Dr. Percival was asleep, and he might not wake up for some time. The delay would be worse than all, and Margaret coughed loudly, and moved the table, and at last let down a heavy book, and then had the painful satisfaction of seeing her father open his eyes, whilst he asked hastily, "Why she stayed up so late?"

"I went upstairs when mamma told me," replied Margaret with timidity, "but I had something to say to you, sir, and I thought I had better come down again."

"Keep it till to-morrow," muttered Dr. Percival, who, like every one else, had an instinctive dread of hearing that any person had "something to say to him."

"You are so busy in the mornings," continued Margaret; "and I think I heard you say that you must go out earlier than usual to-morrow."

"Well, make haste, let me hear."

The tone was disheartening, but Margaret's courage was in full force.

"It was about Craven, I wished to speak to you, sir."

"Craven!" Dr. Percival was now not at all sleepy; he sat upright in his chair, and Margaret wished herself a thousand miles off.

"I had a conversation with him the other night, sir," she continued. "I am afraid he has been led into difficulties again."

Dr. Percival seemed about to speak, but Margaret was resolved he should have no opportunity of venting his indignation till the whole was known. She was not partial either to taking or administering inevitable disagreeables by driblets.

"You sent him three hundred pounds, I know, sir, a little while since; but this is a great deal more,—fifteen hundred, he says,—and some of it he acknowledges from"—Margaret could not bring herself to say "gambling," so she concluded with "debts of honour."

"Debts of honour!" Dr. Percival started from his chair,—"disgrace! shame! ruin! infamous fellow!—fifteen hundred pounds!—not a penny! not a single penny shall he have!" He kicked aside a footstool, so as to upset a small table and with it a work-box, the contents of which were immediately scattered upon the

floor. Away rolled the balls of cotton to the other end of the room, and away walked Dr. Percival pushing them before him, stumbling and ejaculating, his voice raised, his eyes sparkling, his face the colour of crimson. Margaret stooped to collect the different articles, thankful for any occupation. If the case had not been so serious she might have been alive to a sense of the ridiculous, as Dr. Percival one moment knocked his foot against a reel of thread and poured forth his whole indignation upon it; and the next, and almost in the same breath, stormed at Craven as the most extravagant, good-for-nothing young man in Christendom. Having broken the ice, however, Margaret's fears had comparatively vanished, and she waited, almost with unconcern, till her father's equanimity should be in a measure recovered. This was not long. Dr. Percival's temper was very quick, and when he was in a passion he set no bounds to his expressions; but the vocabulary of abuse being at length exhausted, he turned suddenly to Margaret, and ordered her to tell him all she knew of this atrocious business. Margaret ventured no apology for her brother until she had quite finished the details, and had laid on the table the list which he had given her of his debts; and then she said, "he has given his promise, sir, that he will never touch cards or dice again; and I was to tell you so." Dr. Percival took up the paper, glanced at it, and cast it from him with an air of supreme contempt.

"I want no promises, Margaret. I would sooner trust little Juliet's promises than Craven's; you may say so from me."

"Won't you write to him, sir?"

Dr. Percival laughed bitterly. "He won't like to hear from me, I can assure you that, Margaret."

"He has done very wrong, sir, certainly; but there are so many temptations in the army."

"Don't talk to me about temptations; it is no concern of mine."

"But if you could assist him just this once, it might save him for the future," said Margaret.

The remark brought upon her the full current of her father's indignation.

"I assist him!" he exclaimed: "one would think you were an idiot. Where is the money to come from? To be picked up in the streets? Human patience cannot bear such folly!"

"We would all gladly do anything we could, I am sure," said Margaret, meekly.

"Pshaw! rubbish! I tell you what, Margaret; you, and your mother, and Craven, are all fools together." Margaret was silent,

for what could be said? "You think like a parcel of babies," continued Dr. Percival, growing cooler, as his tone became ironical; "that somewhere or other, in the Antipodes, I suppose, I have a mine of gold; and that you may get from it as much money for your fripperies, and absurdities, as you choose; and I may toil like a slave all day, and it's a mere nothing—play-work. But you will know differently by and by, I warn you of that. You are on the high road to ruin, every one of you; and if you don't end your days in a workhouse, it won't be your own fault."

"We will really be very economical, sir," said Margaret.

"And what for? How will economy, as you call it, raise fifteen hundred pounds for that impudent brother of yours? Fifteen hundred pounds! it is enough to make one's hair stand on end to think of it!" Dr. Percival again took up the paper, and commented upon the different items. "'Lost at billiards!' I'll teach him better than that. Did the young puppy think he was sent into the army to play billiards? 'Bet with Major Dawson!' his colonel shall hear of it, I vow. It's positively shameful—cheating a young fellow like him—and an old rogue who has all his wits about him! 'Tailor's bill for regimentals,'—that's your mother's doing; she taught him to be such an absurd dandy."

"There is nothing so very bad except the gambling debts,' observed Margaret.

"And what would you want worse?" interrupted Dr. Percival, sharply. "We shall have you playing next, I suppose, and saying that it is nothing so very bad."

Margaret could not refrain from a smile, and a little absurdity struck her father also. His face relaxed, and sitting down by the fire, he said,—

"There is no use, Margaret, in helping Craven. Your mother knows how he has been going on ever since he went into the army; drawing upon me every year for more than his allowance, and making paltry excuses, which a man with a grain of common honesty would have been ashamed of."

"I know he has been very foolish, dear papa," said Margaret, breathing internally a sigh of relief, for she felt that the fierceness of the storm was over.

"He has been worse than foolish. I can excuse folly, but I cannot excuse deception. He ought to have come to me himself about this matter."

"Perhaps he would," said Margaret, "if I had refused; but it was very natural in him to dislike talking to you about it."

"Yes, natural enough, but that is no excuse: and the long and

the short of the matter is, Margaret, that I can't help him, unless I do great injustice to my other children; I can't spend my fortune upon him."

"Agatha can be no burden to you," said Margaret, "and George, we hope, will be provided for when he is ordained."

"Nonsense, child, don't talk so like a woman. I tell you I can't do it. Out of my income, now, I have to pay insurances to provide for your mother and you, when anything happens to me. They ought to be much larger, for you would find the sum little enough after what you have been accustomed to. Then you know full well that my present expenses are very heavy, and they will be more so when George goes to Oxford, and Philip to school: and, as for ready money, I have not a penny to spare. Craven has drained me, year after year, and the little I had just for emergencies is all to go, it seems, in the same way. And what are we to do if my practice fails?"

"There is not much chance of that, sir," said Margaret.

"But I tell you, Margaret, there is a chance, a great chance. No one can tell what may happen; and if Craven goes on in this way, and I pay his debts, some day or other I shall fall ill, or people will take a fancy to a new man, and then we shall be obliged still to keep up the insurances, and still to live, and what shall we do?"

Margaret saw that there was reason in this statement, and it opened her eyes unpleasantly to the precarious nature of her father's income. Craven's conduct appeared more unpardonable than before; that was to say, if he had really known what he was doing. But Dr. Percival's next sentence convinced her that he had involved his affairs in a mist, and that whatever her brother's faults might be, he had not been told of the extent to which they might possibly burden his family.

"Craven has always thought like the rest of you," he said; "that because we were able to live in comfort, and keep up a good show, therefore my fortune was made, not making. If we were to go on well it might be made, certainly; supposing, always, that my health keeps up: but if, the moment I can put by a thousand pounds, he is to run away with it, there's an end to the matter."

"If you can pay the money for him this once," said Margaret, "and tell him that you never will help him again, it may be the last time."

"It must. It is useless talking of may. If he ever spends a

penny beyond his income again, — if I ever hear of his touching cards, or laying bets, I'll have nothing to say to him—nothing."

"He will not, you may be quite sure, dear papa," said Margaret in her most soothing tone.

But Dr. Percival was not to be soothed. He grumbled, and stood ready to go to bed, and yet unwilling to do so, until he had more fully expressed his sentiments, and even when at last he left the room after giving Margaret a cold kiss, his voice was still heard as he slowly walked upstairs, venting his displeasure in a mixture of groans and reproaches. Margaret was not as much at ease as she had expected to be when the communication was over. Family affairs were becoming a serious consideration — more so than they would have been to her, if she had ever heard them explained before. But one resolution she made immediately, that Craven should know exactly the details which her father had told her, and that the children, as soon as they grew old enough, should have a clear idea of the same facts. Nothing would make them prudent if they were allowed to believe that money could be had whenever it was wanted.

CHAPTER XXXII.

For a few days after the disclosure of Craven's affairs, Margaret had a great deal to endure; yet, upon the whole, less than might have been anticipated. Dr. Percival had an easy and rather indolent disposition; it had been one of the original causes of his son's ill-regulated character, and when he had once seen his lawyer, and settled how the money was to be advanced, he turned away his thoughts from the subject, and in writing to Craven employed a tone and language of even greater mildness than was desirable. Mrs. Percival had no indolence and no easiness, but she had a great deal of maternal fondness for Craven; and the consequence was, that the fondness showed itself in a letter containing a sharp reproof at the beginning, and a full forgiveness at the end: and the anger, in repeated lectures to Margaret, and warnings that if the whole family were not strictly economical they must be ruined. Margaret herself would have said less, and acted more. In her own mind she planned a few changes in the household arrangements, so as to put them on a less expensive footing; but Mrs. Percival never tolerated any interference in

such matters, and Margaret soon saw that things were likely to go on just in the same way as before. She wrote, however, to Craven, putting the evil of his conduct shortly and clearly before him, and giving him an insight into the state of their father's affairs; but she had little expectation that it would have any real influence over him, though it might serve to remind him of his promise. One letter was nothing; it would be thrown aside and forgotten, and it could not be expected that he would speak candidly of himself, when his confessions were to go the round of the family. Craven's answers to his parents and sister were expected with some anxiety, and when the post came in, Mrs. Percival was more than usually eager to seize and distribute the different letters.

"Strange!" she ejaculated, one morning, after emptying the contents of the post-bag on the table, preparatory to an examination of the different hands.

"Any news from Craven, mamma?" asked Margaret.

"No, my dear; very strange!"

Mrs. Percival put down the letter which she held, and Margaret saw the Countess Novera's writing. She stretched out her hand for it instinctively, but immediately drew back; for Mrs. Percival never liked to be hurried in her inspection. The other directions were scrutinised in the same way, and by the time Dr. Percival had run through two of his, Margaret received hers, with the observation—

"Who can write to you from Devonshire, my dear?"

To Margaret's great satisfaction her mother was just then called out of the room, and she took the opportunity of retiring, that she might at least have the pleasure of reading her letter at first in peace, and alone. But there was not much peace in her mind when she had concluded; rather she was perplexed in no common degree. The word "private" was written in the inside, and it was clear that the Countess had no idea that she was not perfectly at liberty in her correspondence. The purport of the letter was to enlist Margaret's sympathy in behalf of the poor girl whom she had once visited; and her history, simple, but creating much interest, was given in detail. Rhoda Newbolt had been residing in the neighbouring town of Eastlake, in the service of a family whose habits were extremely lax, and where no attention was paid to the domestics. Till the age of twenty her mind had never been turned to the subject of religion, except by her parents, who, from their ultra-dissenting principles, and enthusiastic feelings, had given her a disgust towards it. A severe illness first brought her to serious thought, and whilst her notions were altogether

unsettled, she became acquainted with some zealous Roman Catholics, much better educated than herself. The priest, also, had some intercourse with her, and at last succeeded in converting her. This fact was the cause of a separation from her home for many months. The doors were closed against her, and she was told that her family would never receive her again. They had, however, at last been induced to relent, by finding that distress of mind, acting on a weak constitution, was fast sinking her in a decline. She was received by her parents, but their indignation showed itself in so violent a manner, that the girl did not venture to make any open declaration of her faith; and even the attentions offered her by the Countess Novera, upon learning her illness, were a cause of altercation and reproaches. Under these circumstances, the Countess considered that it would be more in Margaret's power to be of service to her, than in that of any person who might be known to be connected with Henningsley; and she therefore intreated her to see Rhoda as frequently as she could, and to provide her with everything which her situation might require, at the Countess's expense. So far Margaret would have had no difficulty; but the Countess had rendered the case perplexing, by desiring that it should be kept secret from every one, lest the family should learn that Rhoda was assisted by Roman Catholics; and, at the same time, begging Margaret to continue a correspondence, which would serve to beguile the months of absence, and to give her some foretaste of the pleasure she might hope to receive again when the summer should admit of her return to Henningsley. Nothing could have been more interesting or flattering to Margaret than the prospect of such an intercourse, but how was it to be carried on? There were many ways of secrecy open to her. She might send her letters privately, or take them herself to the post-office, and she might arrange that the answers should be kept till she could call for them; and this she might have vindicated, by saying that the comfort of another person was involved in it, and that her mother's scrutiny forced her into deception; but, great as the temptation was, since it gave her a hope of retaining the hold which she had already gained upon the Countess's regard, Margaret did not for a moment think of yielding to it. She went at once to her mother, and told her that the Countess had written to her upon a matter of business, and that she was not at liberty to show the letter. Mrs. Percival's desire of confidence was, in the present instance, neutralised by her pleasure in the friendship which her daughter had formed; and Margaret was allowed to send her answer without any ques-

tionings. But she wrote it sadly, under the belief that it would put a stop to any future correspondence. "It could not be otherwise than delightful to herself," she said in her letter, "to write to or hear from, the Countess; and her wishes, with regard to the poor girl, would willingly be attended to, but she should be wrong in concealing from her the knowledge that she was not at liberty to keep any such subjects from her mother. If she might name the girl's case to Mrs. Percival, she was certain that the secret would still be perfectly safe. But if the Countess objected to this, she would prefer placing the pleasure of being her almoner in other hands." The reply to this request came by return of post. It brought a full permission for Margaret to say as much or as little as she chose, though still urging concealment from all other persons; and again the desire of continuing the correspondence was expressed, but it was not as warmly as at first. The Countess appeared to write under some restraint, though it was not sufficient to induce her to relinquish the former idea altogether. Margaret's sincerity was a safeguard against temptation at that time, for the Countess was prevented from saying many things which might have prejudiced her mind further in favour of the Romish Church; and if Mrs. Percival had known the facts, she would probably have brought this forward as an illustration of the wisdom of her own conduct. But one instance of good resulting from a certain line of action, can scarcely be a sufficient argument for its general adoption. Margaret's high principles and straightforward honesty of disposition alone saved her from being led into a course of deception. Where she had stood firm, nine out of ten would have fallen. Certainly, there was not one of her sisters, who under similar trial, would not have gained her object by evasion. Agatha would have given way from wilfully shutting her eyes to the fact that she was doing wrong; Harriet from an unsteady mind; and Grace, from perverseness. Happily the temptation presented itself to one who was able to bear it, and the evil was avoided; but Mrs. Percival had no reason to give herself credit for the circumstance.

The dreary month of November, as it is so often called, passed over with little external to mark its progress. There were leaden skies and dingy pasture lands, and fallen leaves, and sighing winds — and some persons shrank from the cold blast, and clinging to their firesides, foretold a severe winter; and others complained of the mournfulness of the season, and tried to gain cheerfulness by more frequent visits to their neighbours. Miss Debrett

was of this number. In November, she was almost certain to be at the Grove every other day in the week, and Margaret's patience was often severely tested in consequence. But on one point they had now a common sympathy. Rhoda Newbolt's sister had been approved by Mrs. Percival; and Miss Debrett's compassion was fully engaged by her maid's description in behalf of the sick girl. Though she could not walk to see her, she worked for her, and contrived little methods of giving her ease, which, if not always wise or successful, were, at least, kind-hearted, and afforded Margaret many excuses for going to the cottage frequently. The truth as to her religion was not clearly known; and since Mrs. Percival did not consider there was any harm in doing so much for her, Miss Debrett saw no reason why she should.

Margaret scarcely understood the attraction which drew her to the cottage. She sometimes tried to analyse it; but it was of a very complex nature. There was a certain charm in the slight mystery thrown over it; a greater in the fact that it was a link between herself and the Countess; and something independent of both these in the character of the girl herself. It seemed sometimes impossible that Rhoda could have been brought up in humble life by coarse-minded, ill-educated parents. She was like her mother in features, and had, probably, once been like her also in temper; for there was an impetuosity of spirit called forth by even slight opposition, though sobered and controlled by great physical weakness and religious principle; but in other respects few characters could have exhibited a stronger contrast. One was sordid, and at times hypocritical; the other was generous and sincere. Rhoda's intellect was of a very superior cast; she had by nature an ardent imagination, and, when excited, her language became almost eloquent. Her mind was one which only required cultivation to render it very powerful, and there is a cultivation sometimes fostered on the bed of sickness, and in the prospect of approaching death, which will outstrip the most strenuous efforts of refinement. Margaret had never before watched so plainly the struggle between good and evil; the spirit of a fallen nature, and the spirit of Divine grace. There could be no doubt of Rhoda's sincerity. Her candour, and simplicity, and enthusiasm, were evident in all she said; and even in the fits of moody reserve, to which Margaret occasionally was witness, there was a consciousness of error, and a self-reproach, which, when added to her state of suffering, rendered it very difficult to condemn her. In contrast to a vulgar, harsh mother, and a cold, money-getting father, Rhoda seemed like a creature of a different world; and in

private, on the very few occasions when Margaret was not accompanied by the children, and when some fortunate circumstance called Mrs. Newbolt and her youngest child from home, she succeeded in breaking down the barrier raised by difference of rank and education, and gained a glimpse of fears, and hopes, and endeavours, which placed the daughter of the ignorant mechanic completely on a level with herself. At such moments the common nature was everything. Distinctions of rank were forgotten, and, what was far more important, distinctions of religion also. It was this which was Margaret's danger. The minutes passed with the poor girl were comparatively few and transient, but they were spent, as it were, on the borders of eternity. Great suffering alone will inspire reverence; and when it must almost inevitably be followed by death, the reverence increases to awe. We look even on a sick child with feelings very different from those with which we regard it in health; and when Margaret listened to the fervent, humble, though wild and enthusiastic expressions of Rhoda Newbolt, she could not judge her, and think of her as having embraced a religion of error. She did not dare to condemn a piety which appeared more earnest than her own. To Margaret such intercourse was also more ensnaring than it would have been in many other cases, because it brought before her vividly, for the first time, the certainty of mortality, and forced her to look into her own heart, and inquire how she could bear the prospect of death. When the answer came in shuddering terror, and her thoughts reverted to Rhoda's bed of suffering, the wish would often arise in her breast that she might at her last hour be enabled to cast all her burden of sin upon a fellow being, as Rhoda acknowledged that she did, when, after having made her confession to the priest, he had granted her full absolution. This had been the object of Father Andrea's visit; and Rhoda's only fear seemed now to be lest her mother's temper, and hatred of her creed, should be the means of debarring her from the last offices of religion when her hour of departure should arrive. If these were performed, her soul, she said, would be safe. Margaret hinted at the dread of purgatory; but Father Andrea had promised that masses should be said for Rhoda after her death; and upon this promise she rested in confidence. To a conscience like Margaret's, anxious and tender, and easily wrought upon by imagination, this sense of safety was more inviting than any other tenet of Romanism. She reasoned upon it sometimes; but her arguments, like her wishes, all went in its favour; or rather her wishes biassed her arguments, so that she could not

see that this assurance of salvation was but the doctrine of ultra-dissent under another form; the wish to escape from all doubt as to our final acceptance, by making either a feeling of our own mind, or the outward act of a fellow-creature, the certain undoubted sign of that full forgiveness which is hidden amongst the secrets of God.

"I could wish to think as you do, Rhoda," she said, after a short private conversation, when the suffering girl had described the way with which she now looked back upon the follies of her past life, as no longer a part of herself; — "for I should not be happy like you if I were lying in the same state."

"No;" and Rhoda stretched out her thin fingers, and held Margaret's hand affectionately; "but you will come to think it before you die, Miss Percival. I have prayed many a time that it may be so. You will be a Catholic before long, though I may not see it; and you will remember me then; and, as you are rich, you will be kind to me after my death, and ask Father Andrea to say some more masses that I may be quite safe."

The last words neutralised the effect of the former ones: they showed Margaret, what she was constantly in the habit of overlooking, that Rhoda's peace was built on an unsafe foundation, even if her creed were true. Her mind was instantly sent forth on a sea of perplexity. Rest, — that was what she longed for, — rest from the harassing remembrances of past sins; from the difficulties of the present hour; from the dread of the unknown future. At one moment it seemed as if Romanism would give it: the next, a veil seemed lifted up, and a dark scene of suffering was laid open before her, in which the hope of mitigation lay in the prayers of those who might be weak, and forgetful, and poor in worldly goods, and might take little account of the sorrows of the friends whom death had hidden from their sight. Margaret had still to learn that the deep tides of the Jordan can never cease to flow between the toils of the wilderness and the rest of the Land of Promise.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

And whilst all these thoughts were passing in Margaret's mind, where was Mr. Sutherland? Week after week went by, and little communication was held with him, except through an occasional interchange of notes, often hurried on his part; on Mar-

garet's, unconsciously reserved. Mr. Sutherland was busy in his parish, labouring devotedly and unobtrusively in the great cause to which at his ordination he had pledged himself. Something of the fruit of his labours could be seen in the increased attendance of his people upon public worship, the better management of their homes, and the more orderly behaviour of their children; but there was nothing which would have satisfied Margaret, when contrasted with Father Andrea's account of the wonderful success of the Jesuits. It was true that from her own experience she might have learned that the labour of turning hearts to God is the labour of a life; that even when education, talent, and a determined will co-operate, the work seems often destined to be a failure; and she might therefore have looked with patience upon the very gradual, sometimes scarcely perceptible improvement effected by the efforts of a zealous clergyman; but her eye could not accurately distinguish between what has been aptly termed "the galvanic life of Jesuitism,"—a life infused and supported from without; and the inward, independent principle, which acts by itself, and is derived only from God. Even to have lived in her uncle's parish, to have seen what now she knew principally by hearsay, and, consequently, scarcely realised, might not have been sufficient for her; for her faith was too weak to estimate rightly "the day of small things." Mr. Sutherland, in the meantime, dwelt fondly upon the idea that Margaret was at length becoming all that he could most desire. He saw the improvement which had taken place in her tone of mind, and he gathered from her notes that she was sedulously pursuing her duties. She sometimes spoke of her books; mentioned the pleasure which she had derived from Massillon, and the attention which was required to understand the reasoning of Pascal; but there was nothing in this to excite any alarm; and her uncle, in return, would now and then beg her to look at the passages which were his favourites, whilst he frequently expressed his satisfaction at finding that she could take an interest in such studies. The works in themselves were not only innocuous, but salutary; yet a fatal bias towards Romanism might convert them into poison.

It was on New Year's day that Mr. Sutherland again appeared at the Grove. There was to be a family meeting, enlivened only by Miss Debrett, and without him Margaret would have greatly disliked the idea. She could not help disliking every event which brought Agatha and Colonel Clive to the house; and more especially when, as on the present occasion, they were to be

accompanied by Mrs. St. Aubyn. The want of harmony at Ashington it now required no great insight to perceive; and the disease was spreading, although in particular instances, as in the case of the first dispute regarding the servant, it had been warded off. The Colonel changed his mind then, and kept his man, so that nothing further was said at the time; but there were numberless ways of putting Agatha out of humour; and although the annoyance was very quietly shown, it still was shown, and her spite was vented upon all things and people belonging to her husband. His sister was, of course, not excepted. Colonel Clive liked Mrs. St. Aubyn's society, because her gossip amused him. Agatha could not endure it, because it was accompanied by an intrusion into her own peculiar province. Mrs. St. Aubyn would suggest, and make remarks, and Colonel Clive generally approved, and sometimes insisted that the suggestions should be carried out. Agatha always rebelled, coldly, silently, but very obstinately; and the differences did not cease with the day's visit. They were sometimes carried on for a week; and at length only terminated by a vehement burst from Colonel Clive, followed by a declaration that he would be master in his own house, which sent Agatha to her room, to complain of a bad headache, and refuse to appear at dinner. Perhaps the affair was smoothed over at last, by its being assumed, on her part, to be of no consequence; but, in reality, the defeat rankled in her breast, and with it the determination to be revenged upon her husband and his sister the very first opportunity. Colonel Clive's selfishness was irritated by this conduct. His marriage had been one of taste and expediency. Agatha's coldness did not affect him, for he had long passed the age of romantic love; and what he did not feel, he did not expect. She was young, and beautiful, and apparently gentle-tempered and obedient; his fancy, not his heart, was touched, though during the period of suspense he certainly did show as much tenderness as was possible for a man whose first and last object in life was his own individual comfort; but when his point was gained, Agatha's power was over. Her only hope of domestic peace would then have arisen from implicit obedience. Margaret perceived this, and if her sister had ever approached the subject, she would have hinted it; but Agatha was still proudly reserved. She would not believe that others could see what she did not choose to acknowledge; and however great her wretchedness might be, she preferred rather to bear it in solitude, than to seek for sympathy by confessing an error. Margaret owned her fears to her uncle when they met, and he

began to inquire into the state of the Ashington affairs, hoping that he might point out some mode of being useful; but Mr. Sutherland found he could not advise.

"There is no power given us," he said, "to interfere between a husband and wife; and if we assume it, we may injure ourselves, but we shall not benefit them; so Margaret, my dear, rest contented if you can. Persons do foolish things, and they must suffer."

"I doubt sometimes whether Agatha does suffer sufficiently," replied Margaret; "I could almost wish that she did."

"We won't talk about Agatha, but about you, Margaret; you are not looking well."

"I don't know why I should not," said Margaret; "I don't feel ill at all."

"Perhaps it is worn, rather than ill. If you were an undergraduate at Oxford, I should say you had been reading and thinking too much."

"I have but little time for reading," replied Margaret; "but thinking follows one everywhere."

"A certain kind of thought does, which is practical and wholesome, and just sufficient to keep one's actions right; but not the thought which would make a cheek look white, like yours."

"They are puzzles, not thoughts, which do that," said Margaret.

"Puzzles, which seem to grow up in consequence of our actions? Well, I can feel with you there; but what are they?"

"Not now," exclaimed Margaret, and her face brightened into a smile; "just see!—ten minutes to six, and the dressing-bell rang at half-past five; and if you and I were to begin talking now, we should not have finished till the dessert was on the table."

She ran off to her own room. The excuse was good; but she had not been sorry to make it. Some of her puzzles it would be difficult to mention: in fact, there was not one which she could definitely fix upon, and she hoped Mr. Sutherland would not allude to them again. The evening passed in its ordinary way, agreeably to Margaret, because her uncle was present; disagreeably, because she was sorry that he should see the sulky coldness existing between Agatha and her husband. The children sat up later than usual, and Miss Debrett assisted in playing magic music, which served a little to enliven the dulness in consequence of two disappointments. One was, that George, who had left

Eton, and, after spending Christmas Day with a school-fellow, was to have returned home immediately, had petitioned for a longer leave of absence, and was not expected till the following week; and the other, that Mrs. Percival was not in her usual spirits,—she had tried to have a party, and had failed. The invitations had been sent too late, and every one had been engaged. Miss Debrett alone compassionated her. She was sure that all who had declined must be uncommonly vexed. There could be no such pleasant evenings at any other house. She spoke confidently, from experience. The brightly lighted, well-furnished drawing-room at the Grove, with the sound of the piano and harp, the children's merry voices, Mrs. Percival's patient attention, and Margaret's careful efforts for her comfort, were in strong contrast to the loneliness of her small parlour, and one candle, and never-failing flannel work; the only thing which she could see to do at night, and with which she was supplied whenever the charitable societies had any to dispose of. Mrs. St. Aubyn did not feel with Miss Debrett: she remembered the festivities of a New Year's Day which she had spent abroad, and secretly lamented that the English want of vivacity prevented them from introducing any similar amusements.

"Ashington," she said, aloud, "would be such a nice house for French entertainments, she thought she should talk to her brother about it next year."

"I hope we shall be spending our winter in the North then," observed Agatha. "This part of the country is unutterably dull."

"Nay, my dear," said Mrs. Percival, "you have the least right of any one to complain of dulness. Just remember how you have been dining out, on an average, three times a week, since your marriage."

"And your parties at home too, my love," pursued Miss Debrett. "Don't you think, now, Mrs. St. Aubyn, that Agatha is a very gay young bride?"

"Very; my brother is quite longing for a little quiet. I tell him he ought not to have his parties all at once. He should spread them over a larger surface."

Agatha pouted, and took up her work, and Mrs. St. Aubyn went on describing what she should do if she were in Agatha's place; how many persons she should ask at one time, what arrangements she should make; and at last, when Colonel Clive came into the room, urging upon him the propriety of changing his intention of giving a dance immediately, since there had been

so much visiting lately, that it would be thought nothing of. Margaret could not help being a little amused at the scene. Mrs. St. Aubyn was perfectly innocent of all intentional unkindness; yet every word she said was, in Agatha's eyes, a crime; and at last, to increase the harmony, Miss Debrett drew her chair near Agatha, and congratulated her in an audibly low voice upon having such an admirable sister-in-law; "so thoughtful, and so well informed upon all such points: it must be a peculiar comfort to her."

"Peculiar, indeed!" repeated Agatha, scarcely moving her lips, and she turned to speak to her uncle.

Mr. Sutherland's eyes met Margaret's, and a smile played upon both their lips; yet it was soon gone, and Margaret wished that there had been no real evil lurking beneath these little traits of character, so that she might have been at liberty thoroughly to enjoy them. The party broke up rather late, after the proper ceremonies of eating cake, and drinking wine, and wishing healths for the New Year, had been gone through. Miss Debrett expressed her warm thanks for a most delightful evening, the termination proving particularly satisfactory to her, as it consisted in being conveyed home in Mrs. St. Aubyn's carriage, instead of wrapping herself up in a cloak and furs, and being escorted on foot by Dr. Percival's servant, to her own door. Margaret went to her room not at all sleepy, but rather tired; her fire blazed cheerfully, and she had a fancy for a quarter of an hour's reading. But the sermon of Massillon which she wished to finish, was on the drawing-room table, and she was obliged to go down stairs again to fetch it. Dr. Percival had retired to bed, but Mr. Sutherland was still there. He held in his hand the very volume for which she was seeking. Margaret glanced at it, and a thought crossed her whether her uncle had noticed the name at the title-page. She was going away again, but Mr. Sutherland felt guilty by a sort of instinct.

"You want this, my dear Margaret? I had only just taken it up."

"Oh, no, no," said Margaret; "keep it, pray. To-morrow will do just as well."

"For me, certainly it will. I would much rather not have it, except that if I give it to you, you will be tempted to sit up late, and then your white cheek will become still more white."

Margaret peeped over his shoulder. "What were you reading?" she asked.

"I was not reading, only refreshing my memory by skimming.

There is so much to do in these days with our own divines, that there is no time left for those of a foreign communion."

"Sur les Elus," repeated Margaret, as she read the title at the top of the page. "I have not come to that yet."

"It is a splendid sermon; and they say that, when it was preached, it had such an effect upon the people that they all stood up in the church, at one particular part."

"When will it be so amongst us?" said Margaret; but the words were scarcely spoken when she wished them unsaid.

"Never, until our national character is changed. Massillon was a Frenchman, addressing a French audience. No eloquence would have the same outward effect upon the reserved English."

"I don't like that kind of reasoning away of enthusiasm," said Margaret. "The moment I hear any one begin to philosophise, and account for feelings, the feelings themselves seem to me to have no existence."

"And yet to a certain extent we must reason, and reason coldly; perhaps, I ought to say, dispassionately. If we do not, just imagine the fanaticism and credulity which will follow."

"Then you think the feelings which Massillon called forth by his sermon, were a mere effervescence?"

"Nay, I would on no account judge so hardly; in fact, I would not judge at all. The eloquence was undoubtedly very impressive, the feelings were probably very sincere; but they are no more to be taken as a proof of the really good effects of the sermon, than the sudden raptures of the ranters can be considered a sign of the truth of the doctrines which they hold. In all cases where we see great demonstrations of public feeling, or even when we hear such facts as the Romanists are accustomed to put forth of the extent of their conversions in heathen countries, we are bound, not so much to distrust the facts themselves, as to exercise our reason in drawing our conclusions from them."

"Reason may be very well, but faith seems better," said Margaret. She put down her candle, willing to remain longer, for the conversation was taking a turn which interested her.

"Right reason and true faith can never be separated," replied Mr. Sutherland. "Reason is given to enable us to judge of the authority to which we are to submit; and when once that authority has been determined, it will of itself point out that our faith must be implicit. So reason proves the being of a God, and its highest effort can then only bring us to exercise the most childlike faith. Now no reason can force us to give full credence to wonderful stories of sudden conversions, to a great extent, because we

know that the fact of their being sincere is only to be proved by time and careful inquiries."

"But they do show an amazing power," said Margaret, "and the effects of the sudden impression were often lasting."

"Undoubtedly; but what would you argue from this?"

"At first sight, I should say that the doctrines promulgated were true," replied Margaret, whilst her colour rather deepened, and the idea suggested itself of mentioning the conversation with Father Andrea. It was negatived, however, directly, by the fear of betraying the circumstances of their meeting, and the interest taken by the Countess in Rhoda Newbolt.

"If power is the test of truth," replied Mr. Sutherland, "then Mahometanism is true in the East, and Christianity in the West."

"And so you would not think the astonishing success of the Jesuits any argument in their favour?" asked Margaret.

Mr. Sutherland looked at her with slight surprise, but there was no distrust in his mind. He thought that she was only arguing for the sake of information. "It can be no real evidence for, or against them," he replied; "because truth is independent of the effect which we see it produce. I may set before two men the truth that almsgiving is a duty; one may be naturally generous, and may give me at once the tenth of his fortune: the other may be penurious, and refuse to give me anything, but the truth itself cannot be affected by the conduct of either."

"Yet how can great moral effects be produced without truth?" inquired Margaret.

"In the case of the Jesuits," replied Mr. Sutherland, "if I were arguing strictly, I might require you to prove that they had worked great moral effects; but we will take it for granted that they have done so. Now I quite agree with you that good can only be effected by the exhibition of truth; and I think we shall find, on inquiry, that the influence of all religious schemes has resulted originally from the truth contained in them. Mahomet taught the unity of the Godhead, and the necessity of obedience to the moral law; that was the foundation of his power. Its extent depended upon climate, national character, individual talent, personal bravery, and other accidental circumstances."

"I wish you would leave Mahometanism and talk of Christianity," said Margaret. "Have not the Jesuits done more than any body of men towards making converts to Christianity; and if they have, ought we not to believe that their principles are the right ones?"

"As to your first question," replied Mr. Sutherland, "it is one

which can never be decided until the day when the secrets of all hearts shall be known. How far the converts made by the Jesuits were sincere, no person can presume to say. If the conversions were only nominal, or if the greater part of them were so, your argument would at once fall to the ground. But assuming every one to have been real, I would ask you, since you reject Mahometanism, to turn to England in the time of Wesley. There were conversions, not indeed from nominal, but practical heathenism, sudden—numerous—many of them, as far as we can say, very real. If power is the test of truth, Wesleyanism is as true in England as Jesuitism in other countries."

Margaret was thoughtful; at length she said, "Then what would you attribute to the Jesuits?"

"Great zeal," replied Mr. Sutherland; "great devotion to the cause of their order, which they identified with the cause of Christianity, and great knowledge of the human heart, obtained by the practice of confession. Under peculiar circumstances such a system as theirs could not fail of success; but as the circumstances have varied, so has the success likewise. You do not agree with me, I see," he added, looking at Margaret with a half smile: "You think I am prejudiced."

"No, indeed; my reason can go with you, but not my feelings. Very womanish, is it not?"

"Rather so, I must own; but I wish you would accustom yourself to look at such subjects at a distance. Of course I can have no fear whatever of your having any leaning towards Romanism; but it is a very unsafe habit of mind to be led away by feeling so as to form too charitable a judgment. Give all the credit for virtues and sincerity that you reasonably can; but remember it is not fair to allow yourself to be dazzled by a number of facts broadly asserted. You support one cause at the expense of another."

"The Jesuit facts do not meet one very often," said Margaret, "but when they do they are startling."

"Yes, and the misfortune is that persons imbibe a strong prejudice in early youth, without at all knowing the foundation; they afterwards stumble suddenly upon some book, or argument, which shows them that their opinions were exaggerated; and then, by a natural re-action, they go as wildly into the contrary extreme."

"I confess," said Margaret, with the candour which formed so prominent a trait in her character, "that is my case very often."

"And a false argument is injurious to its own cause," pursued

Mr. Sutherland. "If you were still to uphold that the Jesuit system is good because, in some cases, it has produced great results, I could turn round upon you, and say, that in others it has produced small results; and, therefore, in those instances it was not good."

"But that was from accidental circumstances," exclaimed Margaret, eagerly.

Mr. Sutherland smiled. "I have caught you in the trap, at last, Margaret," he said. "Once grant that accidental circumstances can render a system nugatory, and you admit the very point for which I have been arguing; that principles are true or false, independent of their effects. If you, taking the part of the Jesuits, say that I have no reason to declare they were wrong, because they were sometimes unsuccessful; you must allow me to say that you have no reason to declare they were right, because they were sometimes or even frequently the contrary. So now, having come to an amicable conclusion, I must suggest that it is past eleven o'clock and time to go to bed."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

MARGARET went to her room dissatisfied; and so she arose the next morning. Her uncle's cool arguments had shaken, if not destroyed, a sort of mysterious romance in which, without being exactly aware of it, she had lately indulged. Father Andrea's glowing descriptions of the Jesuits had caught her imagination, and whenever she had time for a reverie or a day-dream, it was generally connected with them. Theirs seemed the power which was destined again to work miracles for Christianity; and, as she had no thought of becoming a Romanist, it seemed perfectly innocent to indulge in admiration of a part of the system. But what romance could stand against Mr. Sutherland's dispassionate reasoning? If he had inveighed strongly against them, she could have borne it; but to feel that he allowed so much of zeal and wisdom, and yet that his judgment was not biassed in their favour, was in no ordinary degree provoking. It was still more trying, because Mr. Sutherland was a man whom no one could, for an instant, accuse of coldness, or want of earnestness. Margaret knew, perhaps better than any one else, his sensitive quick-

ness of feeling, and depth of devotion. He was not naturally what is called a cool judging person. He was poetical, excitable, keenly alive to external beauty; he had many of the qualities of which an enthusiast is formed; but he had also a clear intellect, and the first use which he had made of it was to exercise it in reasoning, that it might serve as a balance to his imagination. Margaret possessed much in common with him, but her education had been defective in the one point on which she most needed culture and care. She had very good common sense; but it was innate, not brought out by cultivation. When she did reason, she frequently was correct; but her quickness and cleverness made her generally take the easier mode of jumping to conclusions by intuition; and as these conclusions were often proved to be right, she saw no exact reason for distrusting the process by which they had been reached. But the intuition which may guide us in safety in the ordinary affairs of life, is not sufficient for religion. Error there is most dangerous, and too often irretrievable. It is a question in which so much is involved, both for time and eternity, that we cannot innocently risk a false step. If we enter rashly upon the task of examination — if we undertake to judge for ourselves whilst ignorant of the facts upon which we are to decide, or if we allow an over-wrought imagination to bias our minds, the faults are moral faults, not simply intellectual; and as such we must one day answer for them. Margaret's reason was convinced by her uncle's arguments, but her feelings struggled against the conviction. Yet she was not disinclined to pursue the subject, for she thought it might give clearness to her ideas.

Mr. Sutherland's principles were evidently fixed. As a clergyman of the English Church, he spoke as undoubtingly as Father Andrea; and Margaret knew him too well to believe that he would do this if he were in any way uncertain as to his ground.

It happened on the following morning that Mr. Sutherland came into the school-room whilst Grace was reading her English history. She was wading through the details of the Commonwealth, — not well understanding the exact words which she uttered, and still less comprehending the purposes of the different parties, or why one was better or worse than the other. Mr. Sutherland stood by, listening for a few minutes, and Margaret wished him away, for his presence made the child nervous, and her blunders became ludicrous. She thought he must perceive it, but he kept his ground until Grace had finished; and then calling her to him, he said, playfully:

"Why, Grace, you have been reading of a great many naughty

people, all quarrelling and fighting. What was the matter with them?"

"I don't know, uncle," said Grace. "I never do know about them, there were so many."

"I dare say Harriet can tell, then," said Mr. Sutherland; "she knows all about Charles the First and Oliver Cromwell, I am sure."

"I know a little about King Charles having his head cut off," answered Harriet.

"Yes, and more than that, Harriet," said Margaret. "You used to remember the names of all the battles, and the chief generals, and what the disputes between the King and the Parliament arose from."

"But I have forgotten now," said Harriet; "because I have been reading the Roman history since."

"You can tell me something, I dare say," observed Mr. Sutherland. "Do you know which side the Bishops were?"

"On the King's," replied Harriet.

"And did Oliver Cromwell and his friends like the Bishops?"

"No," said Grace, quickly. "I read last week that they could not bear them."

"And I think they would not let them sit in Parliament, and make laws," continued Harriet.

"Right, both of you. Oliver Cromwell and his friends hated the Bishops. But I wonder whether it was right in them to do it. Were the Bishops bad men?"

"I don't think they were," said Harriet; "but it does not say much about them."

"Bishops are clergymen," said Mr. Sutherland; "chief clergymen—higher than all others; so I dare say they were good. What could have been the reason for Oliver Cromwell's hating them?"

The children did not know what to answer.

"I think," continued Mr. Sutherland, "that the people in those days were fond of having their own way; and did not like to repeat prayers out of a book, as they were ordered, when they went to church, but wanted to say whatever came into their heads; and I think also that many of them wished to stand up and preach sermons, though they had never learnt to do it; and they knew that if they had Bishops to make rules for them about religion, they should not be able to follow their own fancies. Was that right in them?"

"No, very wrong," said Harriet.

"Very wrong, indeed! But then, why was it wrong? why

ought they to have attended to the rules which the Bishops made?"

Harriet made no reply.

"Who first ordered that there should be Bishops?" continued her uncle.

"I think there is something about them in the Bible," said Harriet; and she took hers from the book-case.

"They are mentioned several times," said Mr. Sutherland: "but the Apostles were the first Bishops; now who chose them?"

"Our Saviour," replied Harriet.

"Yes; and therefore you see why it was so wrong in Oliver Cromwell and the people who rebelled against King Charles to hate the Bishops: because they were hating persons whom God had ordered to govern them in all things belonging to their religion."

"But they were not the Apostles who lived in Oliver Cromwell's time," remarked Grace.

"Oh, Grace!" exclaimed Harriet.

"Nay, there is nothing to be ashamed of," said Mr. Sutherland kindly, as he saw the colour mount to the child's cheek. "They were not the Apostles indeed, Grace, because we know that they could not have lived so long; but before the Apostles died, they ordained persons to succeed them, and govern as they had done in all church matters; and before those persons died, they ordained others, and so it has gone on to this present time. Oliver Cromwell did not hate the Apostles, because they were not living; but he did hate the persons who had come after them, and whom he ought rather to have obeyed and loved."

"And King Charles liked the Bishops," said Grace.

"Yes, he liked them very much; and there he was right, though he might have been wrong in other ways. I wonder which we resemble most, King Charles or Oliver Cromwell?"

"I never saw a Bishop," said Harriet, "so I don't know."

"But there is a picture of one in papa's room," observed Grace: "and it is a very pretty picture; much prettier than this ugly old Oliver Cromwell," she added, turning to the stern Puritan features, pictured in the frontispiece of her history.

"A cogent reason for admiration, certainly," said Mr. Sutherland, looking at Margaret, who had been an attentive listener to the conversation.

"I believe there are not very many in the world who would give a better," she replied.

"No," said Mr. Sutherland. "We have learnt to take such a

lamentably low view of the claims of the Church; but I must not interrupt you longer."

"Don't go," exclaimed Margaret, stopping him. "The children have just finished: never mind your books, my dears, I will put them away presently. You may run in the garden now, if you like it, till dinner-time."

The children hastened to avail themselves of the permission, and when they had left the room Mr. Sutherland said, "I could be half angry with you, Margaret, for not giving your pupils better Church principles."

"The governess must have them herself first," said Margaret.

"But you don't mean to say that you can ever look favourably upon the religious principles of the Roundheads?"

"Not as a matter of taste decidedly," she answered: "but in point of estimation I really do not see why they were not just as good as the Cavaliers: they were equally sincere."

"We will put aside the political question," said Mr. Sutherland. "Charles may have been weak, and there were certainly extenuating circumstances in favour of the Roundheads; but as a question of religious truth there can be no doubt, unless you entirely throw aside the authority of the English Church."

"There is so much to be said on both sides," replied Margaret: "equal zeal, equal bravery, equal sincerity; and if you speak of moral goodness, the advantage certainly is on the side of the Roundheads."

"But, my dear Margaret, what have all these things to do with truth? If the Cavaliers had been the most pusillanimous, despicable set of men that ever lived, their cause, so far as it was the cause of the Church, would have been a right one. You are arguing just as you did last night in favour of the Jesuits."

"I don't know how to argue," said Margaret, smiling."

"No, my dear, I really do not think you do. Your mode of reasoning is just that which proves that everything is true in turn."

"But the English Church cannot surely take such very high ground," said Margaret. "It is established by law in England, but it is not the same in Scotland."

"Law can have nothing to do with it," replied her uncle. "The law does not make the Church. If to-morrow an act of Parliament were to pass to establish Presbyterianism, or Unitarianism, or any other 'ism,' it could not affect the claims of the Church upon our obedience, any more than the conversion of half England by the Jesuits could do it. The authority of the Church,

not *of* England but *in* England, rests upon its being a true branch of the Catholic Church, governed by bishops who have descended from the Apostles; holding the primitive faith, and providing for the due administration of the sacraments."

"And Presbyterianism in Scotland?" began Margaret.

"Has no more right to our allegiance there than it has in England. For fifteen hundred years the Church was governed by a succession of bishops, and no one thought of disputing their authority; and if persons wilfully throw off this government, they reject the constitution of the Church, and we must not sanction their worship."

"And what, if they are good men?" asked Margaret.

"Honour them as such; give them credit for every virtue which belongs to them, in the same way as you would look charitably upon the Jesuits; but never sacrifice truth to a desire of having peace or unity. Especially, never do injury to your Church by placing her power on the low ground of being established by law."

Margaret was a little conscience-stricken when she remembered the defence which she had made to Father Andrea. Mr. Sutherland perceived her change of manner, and was afraid lest he had spoken too warmly. "These subjects carry one away," he said, "and all the more because one feels that the Church is now so helpless; oppressed by the State, and suffering from the weakness of her members."

"The weakness of her members, you may well say," observed Margaret. "Look at the working of the Church in this place."

"Look at ourselves, Margaret;—there lies the great weakness,—that which concerns us most."

Margaret's affection made her think what her uncle would not have borne to hear in words. Her reverence for him was returning in its original force, and at that moment she could see no weakness in him.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE following morning . . . a letter from the Countess. Margaret was . . . might hear her mother's exclamations— . . . aret, so you will be pleased!" But . . . correspondent of his own, . . . val recollected immediately

that it was better to make no observations, since she was bound to secrecy on the subject upon which the Countess generally wrote. This letter, however, was different from the few which Margaret had lately received; it was more unreserved, and gave many particulars of the life which Beatrice was then leading. A tone of melancholy ran through it, which was not unusual; but the depression of spirits, under which the Countess owned she was then labouring, appeared to arise less from sad recollections than from dissatisfaction with her present mode of life. "My thoughts often travel to Henningsley," she wrote,—after describing the festivities of the Christmas parties,—"and I sometimes fancy that the loneliness of the old house would be more soothing and better for me than the gaiety of this place. I was at least useful there: here, I can do nothing but what is called enjoy myself; and enjoyment is often out of my power. I am inclined to think sometimes that it is not in the power of any one. I cannot see how it is to be obtained by forgetfulness, and yet half the people I meet seem to have no thought. One thing in particular they can do without, which persons brought up in the faith of the Catholic Church cannot. They live, apparently (for I would not be uncharitable), without laws or guidance. I miss the times and seasons, the Church services, the holy days, which in Italy mark the year as it passes. You may perhaps wonder at my saying this when I have spoken of Christmas feastings; but I know you will agree, that although mirth is a very proper adjunct to seasons of sacred joy, it should not wholly occupy our minds. Lucia sympathises with me; but she is young, and the attractions of society are naturally great; and if it were not for the company of Father Andrea, I should indeed at times be very lonely. Even this I am often deprived of, as he has friends in the neighbourhood with whom he passes a great portion of his time."

"Times and seasons, Church services and holy days," repeated Margaret to herself, as she took the road towards Rhoda Newbolt's cottage, having purposely allowed the children to go out with Mr. Sutherland. "Yes, in such things even my uncle must allow that the English Church is deficient."—And laws also,—where were they to be found?

The life of a Roman Catholic she believed to be regulated even in its minutest details: the life of a member of the English Church seemed to be that which was good in the sight of each individual. Margaret had begun to think of late that rules are not only essential to happiness, but that the desire of acting according to them is so innate in the human mind as to force many into a servile

obedience, under the guise of perfect liberty. She had seen a few instances of this in the conduct of Rhoda's parents, professing unlimited freedom of opinion, yet submitting implicitly to the teacher whom they had chosen, and desirous of bringing every one else under subjection to the same yoke. Sometimes she could reason speculatively upon the subject, as upon any other; but now it came home to her more practically. She was annoyed that her uncle should have found the children deficient in a knowledge of Church history and authority, and the defect was, she felt, to be traced to her own education. She had never been taught to think of the Church, and it was natural that she should not know how to teach them. From the little which she had seen of Romanists, Margaret could understand how it was, that Church principles formed so prominent a part of their opinions. They were worked into their daily life. Rhoda Newbolt understood scarcely anything of the history of Romanism; it was not to be supposed that she could; but she said a certain number of prayers, at certain hours, and had certain days marked out for especial devotions, and thus had a better knowledge of the authority of the Church than could possibly have been obtained by theory. Margaret could not determine whether this system were right; but one thing seemed certain, that her own was wrong; at least, if it were necessary, as her uncle seemed to consider, to put so great a value upon the English Church. It was not easy to estimate it very highly, whilst its influence extended but to one day in seven. She was still thinking upon the subject, when she reached the door of the cottage: it was half open, and Margaret heard angry tones raised in answer to the whispers of the sick girl. At such a moment it was unpleasant to enter, yet further altercation might perhaps be saved by the presence of a third person, and Margaret knocked for admittance. Mrs. Newbolt's voice softened as she said, "Come in;" but her face still wore an appearance of great indignation when Margaret appeared; and in her hand she held a cross and a rosary, which she had just taken from her daughter. Rhoda glanced at Margaret, as if entreating her forbearance, and her mother believing that she had gained a willing listener, again broke forth in a torrent of words, loudly abusing her child, and all who had perverted her, and threatening vengeance upon every one whom she could discover to have countenanced her change of religion. Father Andrea and the Countess Novera were not spared; and texts of Scripture were quoted against them, with a vehemence which frightened Margaret, and made her seriously uneasy for Rhoda. The poor girl's expression and manner, how-

ever, showed that she was now too much accustomed to similar scenes, to be deeply affected by them. She kept her eyes shut, and only once opened them, and gave a sign of consciousness, by pointing to the rosary which Mrs. Newbolt had thrown upon the table, as if entreating that Margaret would take possession of it. This was done, under the pretence of examining it; and when, at length, Mrs. Newbolt was tired, and a little ashamed of her violence, she left them, scarcely wishing Margaret "good morning," and declaring that "these things flustered her so, she quite forgot that she had business in Staunton." Margaret was rather uncharitable in her condemnation of the woman. Her own unconscious leaning towards Romanism, made her forget the form which its tenets must assume in the view of an ultra-dissenter —very conceited, and extremely ignorant; and she thought of her merely as being bigoted and cruel. "This is very sad for you, Rhoda," she said, kindly approaching the suffering girl, who seemed relieved from a great oppression when her mother was gone:—"does it happen often?"

"Oh yes, every day nearly; but never mind, Miss Percival, I shall not have to bear it long."

"But only for once it is very bad for you," said Margaret. "You are looking quite worn out."

"And feeling so too," began Rhoda; but a violent fit of coughing interrupted her, and Margaret was a little alarmed at being left with her alone. The cough by degrees subsided, and Rhoda's first words then were an entreaty that Miss Percival would not hasten away. "If I cannot talk I can look at you," she whispered; "and I seem safe then."

Margaret sat down, and again taking up the rosary, looked at it attentively.

"It helps me at my prayers," said Rhoda.

"That is what I cannot understand," observed Margaret. "What can the exact number of prayers signify? It is the heart which we ought to think of."

Rhoda seemed hurt, and answered, "I don't know. The priest told me what to do."

"And so you never worry yourself about your prayers?" inquired Margaret.

"I try to say them right," replied Rhoda.

Margaret could not ask for an explanation of this sentence, for every word which Rhoda spoke was an effort. It occurred to her that it might be a help to have some rule for her prayers, but she was not sure that all which suited Rhoda would suit her.

"Have you a book of prayers?" she asked.

Rhoda tried to lean forward, and cast one of her quick glances round the room, and then feebly moving the pillows at the back of her chair, drew forth a volume of devotions. Margaret took it eagerly, but was rather shocked by its contents. The expressions were very different from those which she had read in the volumes lent her by the Countess. They were very familiar, and savoured of irreverence; and the addresses to the saints and the Virgin Mary she could not in the least enter into. Rhoda watched her carefully whilst she turned over the pages, and once whispered—"Very beautiful!" Margaret made no observation till she had satisfied her curiosity, when she said — "And this book is a comfort to you?"

"The greatest—better than all."

Margaret wondered, and then reproached herself. She fancied that it must be a want of fervour which made her take offence at the peculiarities of the book; and it did not strike her that the inspired prayers in the Psalms, and in other portions of the Bible never jarred upon her; or that the petitions of our Lord, when offered in the extremity of agony, or given as a model for His disciples, were even awfully calm in their expressions. She would willingly have conversed a little upon the subject, and especially have made some inquiries as to the addresses to the saints; whether they were enforced, and in what sense they were used; but Rhoda was to much exhausted to continue talking. One question, however, Margaret could not help asking.

"You cannot pray always, Rhoda; and you must want something to occupy you; what do you read?"

"Stories out of the Bible and lives of the holy saints," replied Rhoda; "but I cannot do it often, because mother would see."

"So you have a Bible?" said Margaret.

The girl shook her head. "They tell me I had better not; I shall get wrong notions again. Mother reads the Bible!"

To Rhoda's mind the last argument was conclusive; and there was certainly something plausible in the inference which she evidently drew from the fact, that her mother read the word of God only to pervert it; whilst Margaret could not perceive the difference between reading the Bible under the guidance and interpretation of the Church, and reading it by the light of our own individual judgment. There were many contending feelings in her mind as she parted from poor Rhoda. Interest, compassion, and admiration of the sick girl's piety,—distrust, inspired by a long established belief that the Romish faith was unsound;

and a dawning suspicion that some truth might be hidden beneath what at first sight appeared to be unmixed error. When with Mr. Sutherland, Margaret's judgment was allowed its full scope, and she could see, or at least fancied she could see, truth clearly; but when absent from him her old habit of mind returned, and she was inclined to arrive at conclusions without sober reasoning. That half hour spent in Rhoda's cottage had in a degree neutralised the effect of the two previous conversations, and her mind was again alive to the excellencies, and partially blind to the defects, of Romanism. Because Rhoda was so in earnest, and found such comfort in her book of devotions, Margaret began to regard it rather as a fault in herself than in the style of the prayers, that she could not enter into them. She measured them not by an external standard, but by their effects upon a suffering enthusiastic girl. Because the prayers did good, therefore they were good. It was the former fallacy arising in another shape. The park of Henningsley lay before her as she left the cottage. Deserted as it now looked, the thoughts which it recalled were too much in unison with her train of ideas for her to resist the wish of crossing it; and, leaving the high road, she entered it, and sauntered slowly along, pondering upon her last interview with Father Andrea, and the arguments by which Mr. Sutherland (though unconscious of what he was doing) had combated the inferences that had been drawn from the labours of the Jesuits. Margaret loved her uncle truly; but when she compared the different conversations held with him and with Father Andrea, the interest they had excited did not appear equal. On one side there had been suggestions, half-revealed opinions, facts stated, from which she was to gather her own conclusions; on the other, a sober, hard-lined, unpoetical mode of argument, which appeared to accept nothing as truth that could not be proved to demonstration. To support Mr. Sutherland, there was the deserted church, the neglected village, and the painful sense of weakness in Margaret's own heart; to support Father Andrea, there was a visible power ruling the actions, if not the consciences, of the largest portion of the Christian world, and the exquisite vision of the Countess Novera, embodying all that the most refined imagination could picture of feminine beauty and spiritual excellence. Margaret looked at Henningsley, and for the first time wished that she had been born a Romanist. The sound of children's voices broke suddenly upon her ear. Philip was standing on a little hillock, loudly calling her name. He ran towards her, followed slowly by Mr. Sutherland and the two little girls. Margaret's

heart smote her. The thought which had been in her mind! How would her uncle have approved it?

"We knew we should find you somewhere about here," exclaimed Grace, running up to her. "I told uncle Henry that I was sure you were gone to see the Roman Catholic girl."

Margaret blushed and answered,—"What do you mean by Roman Catholic? How do you know she is one, Grace?"

"Miss Debrett says so; and her maid Susan is a sister."

"There is no doubt of the fact, you see," observed Mr. Sutherland; "but is there any particular reason why it should not be known?"

"The poor girl's relations are mostly Baptists," answered Margaret; "and they scarcely allow her to confess her real faith."

"Miss Debrett says Roman Catholics are very wicked," exclaimed Philip; "so, Margaret, you ought not to go and see them."

"I wish Miss Debrett would not talk such nonsense," replied Margaret. The words were uttered in the sharp tone of some months previous, and Margaret knew it, and was vexed with herself and ashamed. "It is trying, is it not," she said, in an under tone to her uncle, "to have one's endeavours to make the children sensible all ruined by such foolish observations?"

"Not quite ruined yet, we will hope," he replied. "But about this poor girl,—is she very ill?"

"Yes, there is no chance for her, as far as we can humanly judge."

"And do you see her often?" inquired Mr. Sutherland.

His tone struck Margaret as if he were considering whether there was any danger in her doing so; and the question had for an instant arisen in his mind; but it seemed hard to debar the suffering girl the assistance of a person of her own sex, and Margaret's manner was too simple to awaken his fears. Margaret's reply was that she went there about once a week.

"I have never been thrown with Romanists under such circumstances," said Mr. Sutherland; "there were two in my last parish, who died, but they never would allow me to approach

case is a very interesting one," observed Margaret, "and o me: the state of mind is entirely different from what customed to see—or hear of, perhaps I ought to say— e never watched a death-bed before."

ould like, for many reasons, to be in your place," said Mr. nd. "It might help to solve some problems in my own

mind. But how can a Romanist endure your presence at such a time?"

"I am almost her only friend, "replied Margaret, "and I listen to her, and do not argue."

"And you think that she is happy?"

"Very, generally speaking. She seems to have thrown off the sense of individual responsibility, and to rest upon confession, and absolution, and being a member of the true Church. Upon that point I could envy her."

"You are a member of the true Church," said Mr. Sutherland.

"So I may be; but the knowledge does not give me the certainty of salvation."

"Was it ever intended that it should?" said her uncle. "Is there anything more than a steadfast hope granted us on this side the grave? Even St. Paul dared not speak of certainty until the closing years of a life of great trial; and he tell his converts to 'work out their salvation with fear and trembling.'"

"Romanists think a great deal about the Church," said Margaret; "it seems to form a part of their very existence: and their confessors guide them so correctly, and give them such minute rules for conduct. In those things also they seem very different from us, and their religion seems a greater help to them than ours can be."

"Than ours is, you should rather say," replied Mr. Sutherland; "and yet in a certain degree you are right. There are more minute rules given for the conduct of a Romanist than for ours."

"And do you not think this desirable?" inquired Margaret.

"Did you ever see a child in a go-cart?" inquired Mr. Sutherland. "It is an admirable support; what should you say if we were to use go-carts all our lives?"—Margaret laughed.—"You laugh," continued her uncle, "because you see at once that we were all designed to run alone. Are you sure that it may not be just as unwise, as contrary to the order of Providence, to put the mind in a go-cart, as it is to put the body?"

"The mind is weak all our life," said Margaret, "the body is not."

"Granted at once; and it should be treated as weak, by having sticks, and props, and outward helps."

"And where are the outward helps to be found in the English Church?" inquired Margaret.

The answer was not then given.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

A FLY was stopping at the Grove gate,—and a slight, handsome-looking youth, just verging upon manhood, alighted from it. His complexion was pale, and his black eye sparkled brightly; but there was a greater appearance of health and strength than is commonly associated with such a form and countenance. Margaret ran towards him in delight—a feeling, how different from that which she had experienced upon seeing Craven! and Mr. Sutherland looked very happy; and the servants came out to greet Mr. George, and to express their pleasure at his return.

"We thought you were not coming at all this time, sir," said Symonds, taking up his carpet-bag, and stopping to look at him again before he proceeded to carry it upstairs.

"That was because I was coming for such a long time, Symonds," replied George; "you will have enough of my company before I leave home again."

"Then you are not going away again, ever?" said Philip, clapping his hands.

"Not if I can help it, until Easter, to Oxford. But where is my mother?" And, escaping from the children, George hurried to the drawing-room.

There are some persons who seem to bear about with them a perpetual sunshine; let them arrive when they will, or how they will, under whatever circumstances, in whatever mood of the family mind, their place in the home circle is always ready for them. They occupy it so fitly, so pleasantly, the aspect of affairs so changes under their influence, that we wonder at the insensibility which could induce us long and patiently to bear with their absence. When George had told his tale, that the friend with whom he was staying had been called away from home by the illness of a relation,—and had thus accounted for his return before he was expected; when he had made all inquiries respecting every body and everything; when he had walked round the apartment, to see that the furniture was unaltered; and, at last, had gone to his chamber to dress for dinner, it seemed quite natural to have him in the house. No one said "What shall we do, or how shall we manage, now George is come?" No one felt "put out." His room was ready for him, his seat was wherever it might be most convenient, his occupations were those which caused no interruption to any one; the only observable difference

was in the general tone of the family. George Percival thought his home a very happy one; his father kind, his mother affectionate, Agatha beautiful, Margaret delightfully clever and agreeable, and the little ones pleasant playthings. And no wonder! home cares were not for him; they were Margaret's especial patrimony; and where George was present Margaret's heart insensibly grew lighter. Only a year's difference existed between them; but George was the younger; a boy when his sister was a woman; and she looked at him, in consequence, with something of a maternal as well as sisterly affection. It was indescribably hopeful and cheering to watch the gradual increase of high principles, and the development of superior abilities, in one just entering upon life, and, as yet, untainted by the sins of the world. George Percival had faults of thoughtlessness, hasty judgment, impatience at disappointment, and a slight propensity to satire, which he shared in common with his elder brother; but they were faults known and guarded against; and Margaret had sometimes penetrated beneath the gay good-humour, that made him the darling of his family, and discovered a spring of deep and holy feeling, which she could little doubt would still guard him from the contamination of evil. When they last parted, whilst her own principles were yet unsettled, she had reverenced her younger brother for motives which did not actuate herself. They met again, and Margaret heard in the gentle tones of his voice, and saw in his thoughtful manner, that he was unchanged, except in having advanced still further in the path upon which he had so early entered.

"He was born to be a clergyman," she said to herself; whilst George was describing to Mr. Sutherland the regret with which he had taken leave of all his old haunts, and his school friends, and contrasting his former life with that which he was about to lead at the University. Even in that short conversation, there was more depth evinced than was common to a person of his age, and Margaret knew that her uncle thought so. A quiet smile of satisfaction was on Mr. Sutherland's face, which Margaret was certain she could interpret rightly.

"And so you have not changed your mind, George, my boy?" said Dr. Percival, drawing his chair nearer the fire, when the ladies had left the dining-room. "You had rather starve on a curacy, than make your fortune in a counting-house?"

"I don't know, sir," replied George, "if it comes to a question of starvation; but my uncle seems to thrive extremely well as a clergyman."

"Your uncle! he is no guide for you. He is a fortunate man; you will never have a living."

"So I was told, George," said Mr. Sutherland, "when I took orders, but it did not deter me."

"And I hope it would not me either," replied George, whilst his colour rather heightened; "I have never wavered in my choice."

"No," exclaimed Dr. Percival, half laughing; "I will give you credit for that. There was never a better example of the firmness—some people, you know, call it obstinacy—which they say is inherent in the Percivals. However, we won't quarrel about it: if you like poverty, well and good; only, don't ask me to share it."

Dr. Percival turned in his chair, and composed himself, apparently for meditation. George discussed an University life with his uncle, until his father was called away to a patient, and then, growing more unreserved, as he felt himself alone with a friend who could sympathise with and advise him, spoke freely of his future prospects. The Church had been marked out as his profession from his childhood, and all his wishes had been directed to it. The remembrance had often served to sober his mind, and check his youthful follies; and now that the time was drawing on, when he might hope to enter upon it, all the enthusiasm of his character was directed towards this one point. After the few years, he said, which he must pass at the University, he should, he hoped, be really a clergyman, and then he would study, and labour, and devote his whole energies to his work, and he could scarcely doubt of success. Mr. Sutherland listened with many happy, but with some painful thoughts. They were not hopes which he could bear to crush; but he felt sadly the disappointment in store for them. Perhaps, when experience of the temptations of a college life had made his nephew more sensible of the dangers which beset his own path, he might be less sanguine in his expectations of saving others from theirs. In the meantime an occasional check was all that could be ventured; and George carried on the conversation cheerfully, without perceiving that a shade of melancholy sometimes passed across his uncle's brow.

"I intend to remain here for two more days, George," observed Mr. Sutherland, when they went into the drawing-room, "and, if you like, we will talk over a course of reading together. Margaret shall guarantee the library free from interruptions."

"Margaret would like to join you," exclaimed a merrier voice than had lately been heard in the family evening party. "I am

sure it must be much more useful to have sensible conversations with clever men than to give instruction in the school-room."

"That depends—but we shall talk Latin and Greek; and what will you do then?"

"Margaret knows Latin," said Harriet; "she hears Philip his declensions every day."

"And verbs too," observed Margaret laughing. "I could say them very well once; but I have given up all hope of being learned, uncle Henry, since a certain grave conversation I had with you. It damped my spirit; and besides, I have no time, now I teach so diligently."

"A libel, Margaret, I protest," said Mr. Sutherland: "to the best of my conviction, I never intentionally damped any person's learned energies."

"Ah! to your conviction, but not to mine. I trace back all my woful fallings off to that one point."

"But what could I have said? I don't remember."

"Oh! that it was all useless, good for nothing in itself."

"In itself; yes, very possibly I said that. There is the greatest difference between making study a means to an end, and making it the end alone."

"You must not imagine though," said Margaret, "that I was humble enough to give up study because you cast a slur upon it. I have gone on still, Germanising and Italianising, and reading all sorts of things; but there is a want of some incentive,—such a one as George will have when he goes up to take his degree."

"Don't wish for that, Margaret," said George; "it makes me ill now to think of it."

"Yes, but I do. I do not mean that I have any craving for distinction. I do not wish to take a first class, or make myself remarkable in any way; but it would be a satisfaction to feel that study was a duty."

"The ten talents, Margaret," said Mr. Sutherland, in a low voice.

She turned round quickly, and answered, "They mean everything."

"Yes, everything,—of course, then, including mental powers."

"But to labour without a prospect of being useful in consequence," began Margaret.

"Or to wrap our talents in a napkin," continued Mr. Sutherland.

Margaret smiled upon him affectionately, as she replied, "I could study for ever, if it were to please you."

"And you will study for ever, though not to please me, my dear child, I am sure, if it is right."

"I can feel with you, Margaret," exclaimed George. "I don't think I could possibly exert myself to the utmost, if it were not for some visible purpose."

Then, seeing that Mr. Sutherland was silent, he added, laughing —

"My uncle thinks we are two wrong-headed individuals; but he is determined not to put us right."

"Margaret tells me I am fond of lecturing," said Mr. Sutherland.

He took up a book, and asked Harriet to play to him; a request which caused a little disturbance, for Harriet was frightened at being asked to play before any one — even before her uncle Henry, who always spoke kindly, and thanked her, and begged her to go on, just as if he really enjoyed hearing her.

George stood by the mantel-piece deep in thought, and Margaret prepared to make tea; and after tea came music, and a game of chess between Mr. Sutherland and his nephew; and, as usual, some plans for the next day from Mrs. Percival, including a walk to Ashington, that George might become better acquainted with his brother-in-law.

"You are not going just yet," said George, stopping Mr. Sutherland, as he was wishing him good night. "Margaret and I have both one question to ask you. We must have an end to our conversation."

Mr. Sutherland looked doubtful if he were in earnest.

"Then it shall not be a lecture, Margaret," he said lightly; "only a very short exhortation."

"Lecture or not, I will listen," replied Margaret.

"Just think then," said Mr. Sutherland, "of the difference between studying for fame, or money, or even to please your friends, and studying because God has given you certain powers, and willed that you should cultivate them."

"Yes," said George, "that motive must be much higher than the others; but I would labour to do good."

"Fallacious still," said Mr. Sutherland. "Who knows what is good? — and even if we think we effect it, how can we be sure that we are not mistaken?"

"And women are in general so shut out from doing good by their mental powers," said Margaret; "and yet they possess them."

"Women are not aware of their own influence," replied Mr. Sutherland; "but your observation certainly holds true as to making the doing good a motive for study. It is not a very

obvious one with them. There is but one rule which will apply to us all — St. Paul's. I need not quote you the text which says, 'we are to do all for the glory of God.' And so, Margaret, whatever powers I knew that I possessed, I would improve them, because in so doing I should be following the line marked out for me. The use to be made of the knowledge would be an after consideration."

"Obedience," said Margaret, with a smile; "your favourite principle."

"Yes, obey, and the reward will come eventually; and if you should ever be shut up in a desert island, with only wild beasts for your companions, and should chance to have saved a library of books, as people always do save wonderful things in shipwrecks, — still study, and study hard. Good night to you both; I hope you won't sit up half the night in consequence of my advice."

The advice was seasonable, and the warning against sitting up half the night not less so. Margaret was strongly inclined to do it, such a new studying impulse seemed to have been given her; and she determined at least to make the most of her brother's stay at home, and induce him to assist her in the many subjects upon which he would naturally know much more than herself. One false idea works mischief in everything. Truth had been judged by Margaret according to its effect; duty by its visible consequences. The one notion would have led her into error in doctrine; the other into neglect and indolence in practice. If she had hitherto been saved, it was because the principles were not as yet deeply rooted, and her good sense and upright mind counteracted the latent evil. Had Mr. Sutherland's opinion been carried out more fully, he might have shown her clearly how an original mistake in motive, a belief that duties are duties according as we see their results, must at last, in many cases, end in the adoption of expediency as a rule of conduct; in the same way as the principal errors of the Romish Church appear generally to have arisen from a desire of what is called doing good, instead of simply doing and teaching right. The first impulse of an earnest mind naturally is to obtain power over others for a good end; the next, to think how that power may be increased; — and then comes the temptation to present truth in a plausible, insinuating form; to dress it up; to make it alluring to human frailty; to bend to the infirmities of a fallen nature; to yield to the power of circumstances; until, at length, the moral sense, originally so pure, seems perverted to sanction any act, if only the final object be that of promoting the interests of religion.

Margaret did not thus carry out the train of reasoning which her uncle had suggested, but she acted upon it the very next morning; and instead of looking to her hour's reading merely as amusement, resolved to make it serve a purpose of duty also. She would read still, but not at random, according to the humour of the moment. The time was to be employed according to some fixed purpose, and the end was to be the cultivation of her mind, because God had given her talents, and would one day call her to account for them.

A slight sensation of envy crossed Margaret's mind as she looked into the library after breakfast, on her way to the school-room. Mr. Sutherland and George had established themselves comfortably side by side; a large folio open before them, and several smaller volumes lying on the table. Mr. Sutherland was talking, and George listening, and Margaret could not help thinking how much more pleasant it would be to stay and hear what was passing, than to proceed to her duties with the children. She half hoped that by good management the lessons might be finished quickly; and so they were; but just as Margaret had given directions for the room being put in order, and had taken up her work-basket to go to the library, she was summoned to the drawing-room.

"Miss Debrett, ma'am," said Symonds; "and my mistress is very busy, and begs that you will go."

The patience and charity which Mr. Sutherland had once deferred inculcating, were at length, as he had then hoped they would be, brought to bear upon the petty trial. Margaret smiled, put down her basket, and obeyed with cheerfulness. It was an invalid day with Miss Debrett; Margaret knew it from the tone of her voice when she first spoke; and not merely an invalid day, but one of depression, and as much irritation as Miss Debrett could feel. She had caught cold, she thought, and she was rheumatic; pain was flying about her, sometimes in her head, and then in her arm or her shoulder. She had not slept more than two hours the last night, and, moreover, she was fretted; one or two things had worried her.

"Not your maid, I hope," said Margaret.

"Why, my love, I can't say no, and I can't say yes, exactly. I do believe, after all, she is a Catholic."

"And what makes you think so?" inquired Margaret.

"A great many little things, my dear. Mrs. St. Aubyn put it into my head. She called yesterday, and when we were talking about Susan, told me she had often seen that young Italian girl at Henningsley stop and speak to her, and she had heard her say that

the sisters were extremely fond of each other; so nothing is more likely. I can't imagine, for my part, why Mrs. St. Aubyn takes such a fancy to the Catholics herself; that foreign girl was always driving about with her."

"And is this everything which has vexed you?" asked Margaret.

"No, my dear, not entirely; but—you must not be angry—Susan talks so strangely, quite impertinently, I tell her sometimes."

"And what does she say?"

"Nothing that is true, nothing at all;—but this is a sad place for gossip; and we were speaking yesterday of Ashington—you know when I can't get out, I am obliged to have Susan about me more, it is so dull else, and then she just amuses me."

"And what had she to say of Ashington?"

"Little enough, my love, and I did not believe her, as I stated at the time; but the people about declare that Agatha and the Colonel are always quarrelling. I told Susan it was very improper in her to repeat such reports, and then she went on to ask if I did not think Mrs. Clive was altered, and looked unhappy; and so I resolved I would come over to-day and inquire about it."

"Indeed, you must not listen to such things," said Margaret, trying to evade a direct reply; "Agatha has been out a good deal lately, and is tired, and that may make her look grave; but some persons always will spread reports in this absurd way, and I dare say Susan is a gossip."

"So she is, my dear, and perhaps I rather encourage her; but I don't know what to do sometimes, my life is very lonely."

Tears stood in Miss Debrett's eyes, and, as she wiped them away, Margaret asked herself whether she had always done the utmost to cheer her solitude. She had very little spare time, it was true; but now and then she might have gone to her instead of following her own pursuits, and the few minutes' cheerful conversation might have given life and interest to the day.

"Staunton is not like some places," continued Miss Debrett; "the weeks go on just alike. My cousin, Anne Duncan, at Eastlake, she is my only first cousin, you know, wants me to go there. She says that I should find it much more comfortable."

"But why?" inquired Margaret.

"Oh! because I could go to church more, and have the clergyman to come and see me. They are very church-going people at Eastlake."

"It might be much better in that way," said Margaret, without considering the interpretation that might be put upon her words. But she was soon aware of her indiscretion.

Miss Debrett's tears increased from a few drops to a burst of grief; whilst she exclaimed at broken intervals—"Yes, I knew how it was, you are tired of me. It is very natural; I don't blame you: very natural indeed."

Margaret was greatly distressed; but her endeavours at explanation were met by a repetition of the same sentences, ending with—

"I shall not trouble you long, my love; my poor frame is nearly worn out. Look,"—and she laid her shrivelled hand before Margaret.

"It is very thin," said Margaret, kindly; "but I think you would be better if you went out a little more. Won't you take a turn with me now in the garden?"

"No, my dear, thank you. I'm not fit for that," said Miss Debrett, a little recovering herself—"I had better go home."

"Not just this minute," continued Margaret; "stay and take some luncheon. The children's dinner will be ready directly, and George is here. You would like to see him?"

"Ah! dear George! to be sure I should. I like to see any of you, my love: and you don't think Agatha is unhappy?"

"People have no right to talk such nonsense about her," said Margaret; "when mamma can let me drive to Ashington some day, it will make a pleasant change for you to go too; and you can walk a little in the grounds, and see the conservatory; the plants are looking beautiful, though it is so cold."

"It is very good of you, my dear Margaret, to think so much of a poor old woman. I told my cousin Anne that it would not do to go to Eastlake, and leave my dear friends at the Grove."

Margaret was a little alarmed at the mention of Eastlake, and prudently forbore to make any further remarks upon it.—"And you will come down to luncheon, then?" she said.

"No, my dear, not to-day. I am not well enough. Give my love to George, and don't let him think it unkind."

"But if you will not stay here, let me walk home with you," said Margaret: "I shall only be a moment putting on my bonnet and shawl."

"Oh! my love, I could not think of such a thing. You don't mean to say you would take the trouble?"

"I shall scarcely be a minute," said Margaret, rising.

"And, Margaret, if you could stay and eat it, I know Susan has a basin of soup ready: I ordered it this morning. Do you think you could fancy it?"

"I shall have nothing but bread pudding, or bread and butter

at home," said Margaret, gaily; "so I had better accept a good offer;" and she went up stairs.

Miss Debrett little thought of the sacrifice which this trifling act of consideration was to Margaret; how it robbed her of the short time which would have been her recreation after the school-room labours; how it prevented her from having any leisure for her accustomed serious duties, before going out with the children; and, in consequence, broke in upon the hour's study afterwards, and disturbed the plan which had been formed in the morning. Margaret's good-nature was so free from effort that, even when most inconvenienced, it would have been difficult to imagine that she was not following the bent of her own inclinations. Yet good-nature and self-denial did not keep her from temptation. The interview with Miss Debrett was a fruitful subject for meditation, not so much upon the report which had arisen concerning Agatha's unhappiness (for though extremely annoying and painful, Margaret was not surprised at it), as upon the position in the world occupied by Miss Debrett herself; advancing in years, lonely, infirm, fanciful, without object in life, and dependent for her whole happiness upon friends, whom the least unguardedness in expression might lead her to distrust. Miss Debrett was a member of the English Church. Had she been a Romanist, would she not have found more external aid to raise her tone of mind?

Margaret walked alone with the children that afternoon, for George and Mr. Sutherland were going to Ashington, and then to take a long ramble over the hills, farther than her strength could carry her. There was but little time for thought when the children were near; but doubts, especially if disagreeable, will come to us through everything; and in the intervals of answering questions, and taking care that Grace and Philip did not run into mischief, Margaret repeated to herself an observation of Father Andrea's, which, at the moment it was made, had fixed itself deep in her mind; "The Catholic Church has also her homes of refuge for women who are left unprotected." "The English Church has none," thought Margaret; "and not only so, but she does not provide for the spiritual wants of persons who might not choose to enter a Society."—It was a very natural belief, especially at Staunton and Deering. Miss Debrett, indeed, had alluded to a better state of things at Eastlake, but Margaret had not inquired in what it consisted.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THERE was a holiday on the following day. Mr. Sutherland begged for it as it was his birthday. Margaret's delight was greater even than the children's, and as the most agreeable way of spending it, she begged to take her drawing and work into the library, if only she could be quite sure that she should not be an interruption. Mr. Sutherland placed her chair near the fire, and George moved the table to the proper light, cut her pencil, and rubbed her colours; and remarked that he was always more inclined to study and think, when persons were in the room who liked studying and thinking also. Mr. Sutherland doubted, and advised him not to try the experiment at college. The conversation proceeded for some time upon points which did not interest Margaret; questions concerning Latin and Greek authors, whose names only she knew. Still it was enjoyable to feel that she might have a quiet morning, free from interruption; and her drawing progressed satisfactorily, while her mind fell into a wandering reverie, taking its tone from the ideas which had of late presented themselves. She thought again of Miss Debrett, and the deficiencies of education, which had made her so dependent for happiness upon outward circumstances; of the Countess Novera, and the different life which she was leading with the gay Lady Anstruther; and of Father Andrea also, and his pursuits and interests. Unlike they all were; dissimilar to each other, and to herself; yet, she felt they must have much in common.

The Countess would be almost as lonely as Miss Debrett, if living apart from her religion. Her happiness was dead, her hopes were over, the spring of her youthful gladness was dried up; and yet she seemed still to have motives impelling her to exertion. Margaret feared that in Miss Debrett's place, even with her own superior advantages, a love of study, and a taste for accomplishments, she should, like her, sink into a life of listlessness, and become much more selfish. Days would slide by, monotonous, [illegible]ced: habits of self-indulgence would insensibly be [illegible]ere would seem to be no reason why she should or [illegible]ct in any particular way. The Countess, Margaret [illegible]d a life of rule; all Romanists, she had heard, did [illegible] was what solitary persons particularly required.

"Law and discipline!" — Unconsciously, Margaret sighed, and spoke the words aloud.

"Discipline!" exclaimed George, laughing, "that is the point we are just arriving at; the discipline and rules of the early Church. Were you thinking of them too, Margaret?"

"Not exactly of the early Church," she said; "I leave that to you and my uncle. The rules of the Church of the present day would be sufficient for me, if they were to be found."

"You must go to Rome for them," observed George.

Mr. Sutherland laid his hand upon his nephew's shoulder and said,—"George, you are to be a clergyman of the English Church, are you not?"

"Yes, certainly, I hope so."

"Then suppose we look at her system, not at the Romish."

Margaret put down her pencil, and listened attentively, and George blushed slightly.

"Persons talk so much in these days of the Church of Rome," he replied.

"I know they do, and for that very reason one should be inclined to suspect something unsound in the feeling which leads them to do so. Fashions in opinion are, generally speaking, exaggerations of truth."

"But you don't condemn the Romish system, putting aside the errors?" inquired George.

"I do not wish to speak of it; it is not our business. Let us work out our own fully; and when we are made bishops, and sit in convocation, it will be time enough to think whether it is wise to adopt the customs of Rome."

"But," said Margaret, in a timid voice, "I do not think I quite understand what our system is."

"You are not alone in your ignorance there, my dear Margaret," replied her uncle. "I believe half the people of England judge of the Church according to its actual working."

"If they are like me they do," said Margaret; "and in this place, you know, uncle Henry, it would seem as if the Church had nothing to do with us except on Sundays."

"Then we will try not to think of this place, or of any place," answered Mr. Sutherland. "Let us just see what the Prayer Book teaches us." He took up one, and opened it at the preface. "First we have an account of the compilation of the services, and a statement 'the godly and decent order of the ancient fathers' having been altered, broken, and neglected, by planting in uncertain stories and legends, with multitudes of responds,

verses, vain repetitions, &c., so that commonly when any book of the Bible was begun, after three or four chapters were read out, all the rest were unread; therefore a calendar has been drawn out, wherein (so much as may be) the reading of Holy Scripture is so set forth that all things shall be done in order. And because of necessity there must be some rules, therefore certain rules are here set forth; and this order for prayer and the reading of the Holy Scriptures 'is declared to be much agreeable to the mind and purpose of the old fathers.' What can be more simple and reasonable apparently than all this?"

"As far as the service itself goes," said Margaret, "I do not think any one can object. It was not that which I meant."

"But as to the use which is to be made of it;—the preface goes on to state, 'that all priests and deacons are to say daily the Morning and Evening Prayer, either privately or openly; not being let by sickness or some other urgent cause. And the curate that ministereth in every parish church or chapel, being at home, and not being otherwise reasonably hindered, shall say the same in the parish church or chapel where he ministereth; and shall cause a bell to be tolled thereunto, a convenient time before he begin, that the people may come to hear God's word and to pray with him.' Now, Margaret, how does your objection, that the Church provides only for the Sunday services stand against this?"

"Practically the same as ever," said Margaret; "it is not done."

"But we are not talking of the practice; our question is with the system and rules. Let the practice be what it may, the fault lies in the neglect of individuals, not in the constitution of the Church. You must keep this clearly in mind, or we shall never see things in their true light."

"Then you will allow that there are practical evils?" said George.

"Certainly, many and great; but we are not come to them yet. Now observe what follows the preface: A calendar which speaks of Advent, Christmas, Lent, Easter, and Whitsuntide; seasons of fasts and festivals, besides particular days on which the remarkable events connected with our Lord's birth and life are commemorated, together with the memories of the Apostles, and the Evangelists, the first Martyrs, and the holy Innocents. I am not inquiring whether or not these days are sufficient, but merely showing that the ecclesiastical year is not intended to pass by unmarked."

"Romanists keep such seasons with greater ceremony than we do," said George.

"Allowed; and in many places we do not keep ours at all. Still, I go back to my original proposition, that the Church intended they should be kept, by providing particular services."

"The services alone do not seem sufficient to mark them," said Margaret.

"Have we tried them, my love? We know the peculiar feeling which is attached to Christmas; but the service for Christmas Day does not differ more from the common prayers than that appointed for Easter Day, Ascension Day, or Whit Sunday. It is custom which makes Christmas Day assume a more distinctive character, and the custom lies in our own power."

"But there is one rule," observed Margaret, "which is forgotten—that which obliges people to fast."

"Not from the fault of the Church," replied Mr. Sutherland. "Here is a table of the 'Vigils, Fasts, and days of abstinence to be observed in the year.' The Evens or Vigils before the Nativity of our Lord, the Purification of the Blessed Virgin Mary, The Annunciation, Easter Day, Ascension Day, Pentecost, and ten others; also the forty days of Lent, the Ember Days at the Four Seasons; the three Rogation Days, and all the Fridays in the year except Christmas Day; making in all a hundred and twenty-three days to be devoted to fasting and humiliation."

"And the feasts are how many?" said George.

"Eighty-one. That will make two hundred and four days out of the three hundred and sixty-five, set apart for particular observances. I think, Margaret, you will scarcely want more."

"No," answered Margaret, "if they are observed. I don't mean to be pertinacious," she added, gently.

"Only you like to return to the same point, as ladies always do," said George, laughing.

"I can understand Margaret's difficulty," observed Mr. Sutherland. "There is something very startling in this great inconsistency between practice and theory; something which does, at first sight, make one unbelieving as to there being any theory at all; but there is no arguing against facts. There are the words written down; the laws for the daily services, and the proper observance of certain festivals and fasts. We may find more days, George, in the Romish calendar; they may be celebrated with greater pomp; but it is undeniable that the necessity for these outward aids to a devotional spirit is fully recognised in our own." Margaret took up the Prayer Book, and examined it, and in a few minutes afterwards left the room. She was glad that the day was at her own disposal, so that she need not

fear interruption, whilst endeavouring to realise this view of the system of the English Church. It was at first, as Mr. Sutherland had said, startling from its novelty. Margaret remembered to have read the tables and rubrics as mementos of obsolete customs; a sort of remnant of Romanism, which, at the time the Church was reformed, men were not bold enough to throw aside. She had little imagined that they contained the acknowledgment of a great principle, namely, that as the human being is twofold, the soul and body forming but one man, so the spiritual being requires a twofold aid to bring it to perfection; the one derived from the grace received immediately from God, the other originating from the same Divine source, but imparted through the medium of bodily actions and outward observances.

When the body shall be renewed and glorified, when "corruption shall have put on incorruption, and mortal immortality," then will there be no need of fasting and self-denial, and the subjection of the flesh to the spirit. We shall ever dwell in the immediate presence of God, and in His presence will be safety; but, until that time shall arrive, not only must the heart be guarded and watched, but the needs of our frail nature, the daily occurrences, and the common divisions of our life, must be stamped with some visible mark of Heaven, or they will become snares and stumblingblocks in our way, and serve only to increase the fatal blindness which leads us to believe that the business of this world is our all in all. Margaret had lately been groping, as it were, by the dim light of her own reason, after some definite external guide in religion, for she had felt that it was not well, either for herself or for others, to be living each according to the rule of his own fancy. When she first began to act upon right principles, the want had not been so much perceived; feeling then had carried her forward, and she was satisfied with having attained a higher ground than that upon which she had originally stood. But as duties and responsibilities opened upon her, and the wonderful facts of the Gospel came out more distinctly to view, all claiming attention, she grew perplexed by a sense of her own infirmity and blindness, and would have rejoiced at the prospect of direction in almost any shape. It had been sent to her now; but in a form which seemed to place any practical benefit at as great a distance as ever. There were the laws, the indications of the particular subjects which were to occupy her thoughts at certain seasons. The year lay before her, mapped and portioned out; but how was she to follow its course? No one that she knew, except her uncle at Alton,

attended daily services, or kept festival days; Christmas and Easter excepted. Still less did either her friends or acquaintances think of fasting. One day was exactly like another to them. On Ash Wednesday and Good Friday, indeed, there were services; but the other distinctions which were made were not worth noticing. And it could not be her part to begin setting the example. Margaret's day of enjoyment, her holiday, appeared likely to produce anything but enjoyment. To become aware of a new duty, and to have no idea how to commence its performance, is a very distressing state of mind, especially when the duty seems likely to attract attention. Once Margaret did heartily wish that she had never said anything about the Church system; that she had not wished to live under rule herself, or thought it possibly good for Miss Debrett. Why had she troubled herself upon such a point? But it was a cowardly thought, and conscience reproached her for it. If the observance of these days were a duty; if it were ordered and she were bound to obey, she ought on no account to shrink from it. Again she referred to the Prayer Book; but there were still the same words, the only minute direction accompanying them being, that if a feast-day fell upon a Monday, the vigil, or fast-day, should be kept upon the Saturday instead of the Sunday; showing that it was taken as a matter of course that the rule should be adhered to. Margaret remembered the simple way in which the Countess Novera had once, in the course of a conversation, alluded to the fact of its being a fast-day. Such things came quite naturally to a Romanist; but they were great difficulties to a member of the English Church. The comparison, again, placed the latter in a lower position, for Margaret did not recollect her uncle's distinction between the neglect of individuals and the neglect of the Church itself. She pondered upon the matter long, and the luncheon-bell rang before she arrived at any definite opinion. Mr. Sutherland little knew the uneasiness he had caused by his wish to instil Church principles. As a man, he was independent; he might attend daily services, and keep fasts and festivals, and few persons would say anything about it; or, if they did, he could smile at the observation he attracted, and pursue his own course unheeding. But, with a woman, a young girl, one of a large family, professing no deeper religious principles than those of the world around it, the case was widely different. Above all things, Margaret dreaded to draw upon herself any remarks. Retiring, delicate, and reserved, even had it been praise which was to follow her, she would have found it pain. Her dislike to

betraying her most cherished feelings was so great, that she had now and then been tempted even to assume a lighter tone than became the occasion, in order to conceal some better thoughts. And were she once to adopt a strict rule of life, all her principles must be known and discussed; perhaps argued against. Margaret had often wished herself a man, in order that she might do good on a large scale; now she wished it most earnestly for another reason—that she might not care for being talked about. And then, if she did determine upon following out the Church rules, how was it to be done? Daily services there were none. Vigils, if they meant sitting up all night, would incapacitate her for the duties of the next day. Fasting she had never tried; but she believed that it would make her extremely ill. The easiest way to solve the difficulty was to determine that the regulations were made for a different state of society, and could not apply to the present day. But three hundred years ago! it was not so very long. Persons lived then in families, and ate, and drank, and slept, and visited; the broad outlines of their lives were the same; yet the Church, when casting aside the errors of Romanism, thought it necessary to enforce definite rules, and evidently did not contemplate the possibility of a departure from them. Margaret possessed a more distinct notion of the Church than formerly, and could not but acknowledge that it had a claim of authority over her, though the idea was still rather an abstract one. She could not set aside its laws as she would once have done; but it certainly was very strange that every one else seemed to do so. Her uncle, indeed, might be an exception. Upon thinking over his mode of life, Margaret had some reason to believe that it was governed according to a stricter law than that of the generality of the world; but she lived at a distance from him, and when they were together she had never watched him narrowly, or tried to discover why he did, or did not do, certain things. Could she ask him the question? or—which would indeed be better—could she seek his advice as to what would be proper for herself?

Unreserved persons can have little idea of the pain it is to those whose dispositions are unlike their own, to speak upon personal subjects. Margaret would not have called herself reserved with her uncle; she had talked to him freely; they had conversed upon almost every subject which interested her; but then it was in general terms. Where subjects immediately referred to herself, she had implied her feelings rather than mentioned them; and this especially since she had really acted from religious

motives. Discussing the fasts and festivals as a question of curiosity, or even philosophising upon their necessity, was quite another thing from seeking minute directions for her private conduct. Margaret envied the Countess's intimacy with Father Andrea, and was again rather inclined to murmur against her own Church. Perhaps she might have done so less had she considered that the English Church allows, and even commands, in questions of conscience, a free communication between the clergyman and his spiritual charge; and that although the custom has grown into disuse, the cause may arise as much from the fault of the laity as from the omissions of the clergy. In a highly artificial state of society, there must be a great difficulty in finding a middle way between the practice of confession and spiritual direction, as it is carried on in the Romish Church, where the priestly power interposes between the sacred confidence of husband and wife, parent and child, brother and sister, friend and friend, and the neglect of this particular guidance in the working of the English Church: but the difficulty is not the creation, but the misfortune of the Church, and cannot with justice be laid to her charge. So Margaret did not think then. She felt that she could have said anything to a confessor like Father Andrea, especially appointed to hear her; but to her uncle, gentle, and considerate, and judicious though he was, she could not apply; and she said to herself, that the Romish Church would suit her particular disposition much better than the English.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THAT conclusion was arrived at in the morning; before night Margaret was in a different frame of mind. The day had been haunted by the one idea, following her in her walks, her conversations, her private studies, and solemn devotions. She could not bear it longer. On the morrow her uncle would be gone, and many weeks might pass before he came again. Writing would be almost as painful as speaking, and less satisfactory; and if she could make but a single effort the hardest task would be over. Mr. Sutherland and George went into the library late in the evening to finish something which they were doing together. The fire had been kept up purposely, and Mr. Sutherland spoke of sitting up late, as he had letters to attend to, and he must leave

the Grove early in the morning. Margaret listened, when her mother sent her to bed, and found that they were still talking, but the door soon opened, and she heard George say "good night." Presently afterwards her uncle came up stairs also, and she fancied he had changed his mind. He stopped, however, at her door, knocked, and asked for a paper which he had given her in charge, and which she had put carefully away.

"It is in one of the drawers of the library table," said Margaret. "I will come and look for it."

Mr. Sutherland begged her not to trouble herself; he should find it easily, he had no doubt; but Margaret insisted upon going down again; and, as she went, tried to determine whether she should take advantage of the opportunity, and state her difficulties.

The paper was hidden beneath a few others, and there was a little delay in discovering it; perhaps increased by Margaret's absence of mind. It was produced at last; but still Margaret lingered. Mr. Sutherland stood by the fire, and she thought he looked impatient for her to go.

"Good night," she said, in rather a hesitating voice.

"Good night, my love, and thank you. I shall not be long, for I find that I must put off answering three of my letters till I am at home."

"Then you are not very busy?" asked Margaret, her courage increasing. It seemed extremely foolish to lose such an occasion of seeking his advice, if he really could attend to her!

"No, not at all busy as I expected to be; why did you ask?"

"Because if you were not," — Margaret stopped, but there was now no receding.

"You would like to stay and talk to me, is that it?" said Mr. Sutherland.

"I should not like it," replied Margaret, smiling; "because I want to ask you about some disagreeable things: but I should be very much obliged if you could listen to me."

Mr. Sutherland wheeled his arm-chair away from the table, and pushed aside his papers. "We will leave them all," he said, "if it is necessary. You and I may not have opportunities for conversation again, for many a long day."

Margaret thought the preparations rather frightening, and could almost have fancied she was going to confession; but she placed herself opposite, and without allowing any time for reserve to gain the mastery, began: "You said a great deal about fasts and festivals this morning, Uncle Henry, and I think you were right; but the notion was never put into my head before, and I

cannot make out what ought to be done, — what I ought to do; and I want you to tell me, if you would be kind enough." Margaret's quick yet faltering voice was a sufficient indication that for some reason or other this personal application was an effort to her.

"It is a difficult subject for us all, my dear Margaret," replied Mr. Sutherland kindly; "but I do not think there can be any doubt as to the duty."

"No one seems to attend to it," said Margaret; "and — you won't be shocked at me — it seems impossible to make oneself singular by beginning. I don't know, indeed, how to set about it."

"But, Margaret, that cannot be a fair argument against any practice."

"No, no," replied Margaret; "but," she added, eagerly, "I do not think you, or any man, can tell a woman's difficulties; how much harder it is for us to put ourselves forward than it is for you; and, I know I am very foolish and wrong in that way, I do so dread people's noticing, and making remarks. You will think me very weak."

"No, my dear; I am sure it is not weakness. The feeling originally is a very right one, and it may serve to help you to discover your duty."

"But I should never be a martyr with such a feeling," said Margaret.

"Yes, you would, if it came to the trial, and you had a full consciousness of obeying a positive command of God to support you. If it were a question of not stealing, or murdering, you would not be afraid to brave public opinion."

"No," said Margaret, "I hope not."

"But the duty of fasting stands upon different grounds," said Mr. Sutherland. "It is not part of the moral law binding upon all persons, under all circumstances; and although it is plainly inferred to be a duty in the Bible, yet it is accompanied by a clear warning that it is not to be done to be seen of men."

"Then what becomes of the law of the Church?" inquired Margaret. "There ought to be no public fasting."

"That which is public and common ceases to excite remark," replied her uncle. "We are told not to say prayers publicly in the streets, and you might conclude in the same way, that public worship is forbidden; but there is no ostentation in our services, because there is no affectation of singularity. So it was once with fasting."

"And so it ought to be now," observed Margaret.

"Yes, so it ought to be, indeed; but as the state of the Church and of society has altered, and fasting is now acknowledged as a duty only in theory, we must inquire what part we have to act under such a change."

"To fast privately, I suppose," said Margaret; "which is almost impossible."

"I do not say so for all persons," replied her uncle. "There are those who are rulers and guides in the Church, and who are bound to set an example; but that is not your case."

"No, indeed!" exclaimed Margaret.

"And if you step out of your position, and make an open profession, which is not required of you, it can be no wonder if you bring remarks upon yourself."

"But it seems cowardly," said Margaret, "to shrink from a positive duty."

"I think, my love, your difficulty arises from not clearly perceiving your true position in the Church. What might be very cowardly in me, as a clergyman, may be nothing but humility and modesty in you."

"The early Christians might have reasoned thus," said Margaret, "when they were called on to deny their faith."

"Nay, Margaret, the cases are not in the least analogous. The moral law is distinct from the ecclesiastical law. The first is imperative on all persons, at all times; the latter may and will change: and when any of its commands are become obsolete, however wrongly, it is for persons in authority to revive them openly; but not, perhaps, for young persons situated as you are."

Margaret breathed more freely, yet the dread of cowardice still haunted her.

"Just think," continued her uncle, "what would be the consequence, if all the young ladies in England should take upon themselves publicly to uphold the laws of the Church more strictly than their parents and the clergy?"

"If all young ladies felt as I do," said Margaret, "they would never wish what they did to be known."

"So you think now, and in the commencement singularity would be a great effort to you; but when you had once conquered the first difficulty, all your trouble would be over. It would be your way,—a way professedly more saintly than that of others, and, as such, deserving of and obtaining admiration at the risk of tainting the simplicity of your motives."

"And the rules of the Church will be nothing to me, then, after all?" said Margaret.

"Yes, my dear, indeed they will and must be a great deal to you; but in private, without the slightest ostentation."

"And how?" Margaret waited an instant, and then added, hastily, "You do not know, Uncle Henry, how very ignorant I am: if you would only talk to me just as you would to a child."

"And give you minute directions? but that is not quite possible."

"Give me something," said Margaret: "I have been in such perplexity to-day."

"I would give you everything that could really help you," replied her uncle; "but after all, there must be very much left for yourself. My rules would be extremely simple."

"If I could have any," said Margaret, "I should be contented."

"Then, in the first place, whatever you determine to do in the way of self-denial on the particular days marked by the Church, let it be something which may be adhered to strictly. Do not attempt entire fasting at first, even if you are able to do it without attracting attention, and never practise it at all, if it should be injurious to your health. Begin with abstinence from certain things which would be agreeable to you, and carry out the self-denial through the whole day by checking yourself in your amusements or luxuries. If you are sincere, as I am sure you are, your own observation will guide you more than anything I can say. I will only name such things as choosing less amusing books, and not giving way to allowable comforts; and perhaps, on the vigils, adding something especially to your nightly devotions — not what may keep you from sleep, so as to unfit you for the duties of the following day, but that which may serve to mark the particular time."

"These are very trifling things," said Margaret. "I don't mean," she added, blushing, "that I have ever tried to do them, or that they may not be a great deal too difficult for me."

"We think little of trifles," replied Mr. Sutherland, "from a very mistaken idea that austerities are in themselves good; whereas they are only means to an end."

"I know it is my habit of mind to think so," observed Margaret: "I always admire the Saints who bore hard penances."

"Admire them if you will, but it must be because they were humble and holy, not because they wore sackcloth, and scourged themselves. 'Bodily exercise,' Saint Paul warns us, 'profiteth little; but godliness is profitable unto all things.'"

"It seems as if it were scarcely worth while to practise such petty self-denial," said Margaret.

"But if this petty self-denial is the means of leading you to greater piety—if it is constant and sincere, and performed without the possibility of obtaining praise, you will not call it scarcely worth while to practise it then."

"Will it lead to greater piety?" inquired Margaret.

"Not alone; and therefore I would give you other suggestions, if you will listen to me."

Margaret looked at him gratefully, and said: "It is a great comfort to talk to you!"

"Then I would say to you most earnestly, my dear child," continued Mr. Sutherland, "that all you can do will be nothing, if you do not also pray and meditate at these times: that is the great object for which they are appointed; to remind us that we are to bestow more thought upon Heaven, and less upon earth. All through the day we are to try and remember the particular event which we are celebrating, and our devotions are to have a special direction in consequence."

"I know how it will be with me," said Margaret, in a tone of sadness. "I shall do the things because they are ordered, but I shall have no feeling about them."

"It is a great danger with us all; but still we must persevere. And another temptation, which you will find, is that of making excuses and allowances for yourself. The little self-denials I have mentioned are not at all easy to persevere in, and when you have nothing external to enforce them, you will be inclined to say that it is better not to attend to them, lest some one should remark it; or you will think that you are not at all the better for them, and so be induced to give them up. General public fasting is much easier, for this reason, than private, because we have public opinion to support us."

"I can foresee all that," said Margaret; "I shall despair if I do not improve."

"One sufficient safeguard against giving up such a system of self-mortification," continued Mr. Sutherland, "is to enter upon it not with any view to its doing you good, but merely as an act of obedience to the Church. With regard to the excuses, you must indeed keep a careful watch over yourself. Let your strictness be a test of your sincerity, and be alarmed when you find yourself yielding, even if the motive be plausible. I could prophesy that you, as well as every other person who has endeavoured to live by rule, will make great discoveries of weakness, by attentively observing your conduct in this respect."

"There is no doubt of that," said Margaret; "and I would rather you thought badly of me than well."

"Margaret, my dear! that is the last thing I could think of you. I am quite certain that you are sincere; and if I give you cautions, it is only because I need them myself."

Margaret's eyes filled with tears. "I never thought, when I began," she said, "how hard it would be to be good."

"Yet we might form some notion of it," replied her uncle, solemnly, "from the price which was paid to ransom us from evil."

Both were silent for a few moments, and then Margaret showed the turn which her thoughts had taken by saying: "And we are so cold still!—I am, I mean."

"It will not always be so," answered Mr. Sutherland; "and the first perception of a better state of mind is one of exquisite happiness. There is no love like it, Margaret."

"Do you really think that attending to the Church rules will make me feel it?" asked Margaret.

"Yes, if undertaken in the right spirit; but there is danger in all these things; a great danger in the present day."

"How? what?" exclaimed Margaret, quickly. "I thought I must be safe, now."

"The Church is the visible representative of our Lord's government upon earth," said Mr. Sutherland; "as such, it has the highest claims upon our allegiance,—but it is only for His sake. We may seek to advance the Church merely for itself; we may be strictly obedient to rules and rubrics; zealous in making converts; and even munificent in giving money; and all the time we may not be serving God. We may be making an idol of the building, instead of worshipping Him who dwells within it." Margaret sighed deeply. "I will tell you one way to guard against this mistake," continued her uncle: "Do not talk upon such subjects, if you can help it, to any persons but those who can either give you advice, or whom you know well to be very much in earnest. Even with them, reserve is better than too much openness. Look at this," he continued, taking up a small volume of poetry which lay beside him, "it expresses exactly what I mean:—

> "'Prune thou thy words, the thoughts control
> That o'er thee swell and throng;
> They will condense within thy soul,
> And change to purpose strong.'"

"But if a subject interests one greatly——" began Margaret.

"The more painful it will be to discuss it, when it is only

discussion," replied Mr. Sutherland. "There has sprung up in these days, what I scarcely know how to designate but as a sort of high Church cant, which is just as injurious, though perhaps not quite as disagreeable, as what is commonly so called. Persons no sooner meet than they enter upon Church architecture, daily services, and rubrics, peculiar preachers and peculiar books, and from thence they go on to convents and monasteries, and sisters of charity, and perhaps praise a life of asceticism; and when they part it seems that they have had a most innocent useful conversation."

"And are not such subjects innocent?" said Margaret.

"Innocent in themselves, and even sacred, many of them: for that reason all the more dangerous if brought forward lightly. No one can go away from conversing upon such topics in any spirit but that of humility and deep earnestness, without doing material injury to his own spiritual character."

"But I may talk to you," said Margaret.

"Yes; talk and write to me about any and everything, but not to the rest of the world. Though, remember, I am only giving you a general principle to be applied as your own judgment shall see fit."

"It will be long before I shall be good enough to talk," said Margaret.

"That is precisely the feeling I should wish you to have, and the more you act upon it, the more real you will become. I am rather of opinion that it is not good for us openly to praise any course of life, until we are sure that we should be willing to adopt it: the probability is, if we do, that we shall be satisfied with the admiration only."

Margaret stood, aware that she ought to depart, and yet unwilling to go. "When you are away," she said, "difficulties will arise, and I shall have no one to help me."

"No human help," said Mr. Sutherland; "but far more than sufficient from another source. You will never forget prayer, and your Bible, and the Holy Communion."

"Mamma will not always go to the Communion," said Margaret.

"Then, my love, you must go alone. Say that you wish it, and you cannot be refused. There is no private way of performing that duty, and it is imperative."

"And if it does not give me comfort?" said Margaret.

"Who are we, Margaret, that we should think of comfort? But it must and will come at last if you persevere. When we

begin the practice as a duty, with sufficient preparation and reverence, it will assuredly turn into a blessing; how great, no words of mine could tell you."

"Shall I ever be like you?" said Margaret, as she leant over her uncle's chair, to wish him good night. Mr. Sutherland almost drew back, and in a still more serious tone he said:—

"Margaret, you would never use such language if you knew the pain which it causes me. I have spoken to you now as a clergyman, but I could speak as one who has to bear the same difficulties, and the burden of the sins of eight and thirty years."

Margaret's only answer was a silent kiss. The remembrance of Father Andrea flashed across her, but at the moment he did not awaken in her mind more interest and reverence than her uncle.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

Once more the summer sky was unclouded, and the fresh foliage of the trees, the bright verdure of the park and the lawn, and the varied colours of the flowers, made even the desolate Henningsley assume a cheerful aspect. The Countess Novera stood with Father Andrea and Lucia by the open stone balustrade, in front of the house, and surveyed the landscape before her with feelings of reverential gratitude.

"The works of God are everywhere very beautiful father," she said. "Even in Italy there are few scenes more lovely than this."

"It is not equal to Devonshire," remarked Lucia.

The Countess was hurt, for she was not inclined for a comparison, still less for one which implied discontent. "You should have remained in Devonshire, Lucia," she replied; and the sentence was scarcely ended when Lucia had turned proudly aside, and the Countess sighed over her own unguardedness. "Poor child!" she said, putting her arm around her young charge; "it is rather a change for you from all that gaiety to this loneliness; but you will meet your first friends soon. Mrs. St. Aubyn will be here directly she knows that we are arrived; and Father Andrea and I have agreed that it is better for me not to shut myself up too much; so we will have as much society and amusement as the old house can give us."

Lucia's countenance rather brightened at the idea; but Father

Andrea's grew clouded, and, as Lucia, after an earnest "mille grazie, Signora," walked away to gather some flowers, he said—

"Happiness is dearly purchased at the price of simplicity of mind."

"Was I wrong?" inquired the Countess. "I thought you had said it would be the best thing both for her and myself."

"Yes, but I regret the necessity. I hoped that her love for you would have satisfied her, wherever she might be."

"Ah, father, then even you, after all your experience, do not know a woman's heart! Undivided affection, that is what it must give and receive; and Lucia knows that such she cannot have from me. She will be happy when she is married, but not till then."

"Happy?—never!" exclaimed the father, emphatically. "Jealousy in friendship must be jealousy in love likewise, and exclusive earthly affection is not necessarily an ingredient in happiness. Lucia will be her own self-tormentor until she dies."

"I can scarcely blame her, father," said the Countess. "My own life would have been miserable, if it had not found an object on which to expand its affections; and now, that all is passed as a beautiful dream, I am still blessed in the remembrance of what once was; and I can venture more hopefully to bestow the love which is still remaining. So it would be with Lucia."

"But not if her heart grows worldly," replied the confessor. "In that case she will never know a deep, enduring attachment; for her feelings will all be selfish. I can see that her character is deteriorating."

"And what can we do?" asked the Countess; "return to Italy?"

"That is scarcely advisable, as yet; there is much to be arranged about your property; and"—he turned to see that Lucia was not near, and added, "we must not forget Miss Percival."

"Forget!" repeated the Countess, "no, impossible. I have anticipated being with her as my great comfort in returning. But are you sure that you are as sanguine of success as when we parted?"

"Nearly so. I see a tone running through her letters, constrained though they sometimes are, which tells me that her interest in our faith still remains. She speaks more of her own Church, it is true; but her imagination is too vivid to be long satisfied with it."

"I have some hope from her kindness to that poor girl," said the Countess, "she has visited her so constantly."

"Yes, and of her also I would speak, my daughter. It is necessary that she should be removed from her home: she must not die amongst heretics. Do you think you could receive her here?"

The Countess looked at him in extreme surprise.

"Doubtless, father, if requisite; but can it be good to take her from her friends? Forgive me for asking."

"They have ceased to be her friends," he replied; "nay, they are now her greatest enemies, for they would debar her from the last offices of the Church, and her hours are apparently numbered. I have inquired concerning her this morning, and I am told that she can scarcely live another week."

"I will go instantly, and give orders," said the Countess, walking towards the house; "but," she added, and stopped to consider, "how can it be done? No force can be used in such a case; and the family will never consent."

"My hope is in Miss Percival," said Father Andrea. "She may be listened to when you would not be heard. Could you not ask her to come to you, that we might talk over the matter?"

"I had half expected her this afternoon," replied Beatrice, "for I wrote to her to say that I should be at home, and alone; but if this case is so serious, perhaps I had better send for her at once."

"You do not wish to delay," said Father Andrea, with a smile.

"No, I confess the morning has seemed very long; but, father, I would conquer this, and every other affection, if you thought it right."

"Go on, my daughter," replied the confessor; "you have entered upon a course which will bring glory and honour to yourself, and salvation to her you love."

The Countess stood for a moment in meditation; in fancy her end was achieved, and Margaret was a Romanist; but there were many steps to be trodden before that hope could be reality, and waking up from a pleasant dream, she re-entered the house.

Margaret Percival's outward employments were little altered since, nearly eight months before, she had caught the last glimpse of the Countess Novera. Still she sat in the morning in the school-room, with the children, and looked out upon the secluded garden, though it was now gay and sunshiny, and birds sang merrily amongst the trees, and hopped upon the walks; and flies crawled upon the window; and wasps buzzed around her head, to the trial of her own nerves, and the effectual distraction of the children's attention.

"It is the feast of St. Barnabas to-day," said Harriet, taking

down her Bible and Prayer Book from the shelf. "We shall read the epistle and gospel."

"And say the collect," added Grace. "I like collects much better than hymns, they are so much shorter."

"Grace should not like collects for that reason, Margaret, should she?" asked Harriet.

"No, certainly not; but Grace will know better by and by. Collects are prayers, and the reason you learn them now is that you may have them always ready when you want to know how to pray."

"And we shall read about the fasts and festivals," said Philip; "I like that book."

"And I like the half-holiday!" exclaimed Grace, clapping her hands.

Margaret motioned for silence, and the reading began. The questions, when it was ended, were very simple and short; but there was an earnestness in Margaret's manner when she spoke to them of him who was called "the son of Consolation," which even children so young could not fail to appreciate. A deep feeling was in her own heart. When she dwelt upon the blessing of giving comfort, visiting the sick, and assisting the poor, fancy carried her to the scene of suffering which she had witnessed on the previous day—the dying bed of Rhoda Newbolt.

"You can't be exactly like St. Barnabas, Margaret," said Harriet, "because you are a woman; but I think you would be, else."

"Because she goes to the cottages?" asked Grace.

"No, Grace," replied Margaret, smiling; "I am afraid no going to cottages will make us like St. Barnabas; for that is only doing the sort of things which he did, and all the time we may not be in heart the least like him."

"But don't you feel like him when you go to see the Roman Catholic girl?" asked Philip. "Miss Debrett's Susan declares you are kinder to her than any one."

Such home questions were awkward, and Margaret, evading the answer, said that it was not so much whether we were sorry for people in any one instance, which showed whether we were like St. Barnabas; but whether we were always trying to be kind to all persons, and understand why they were unhappy, and were willing to put ourselves out of our way for them, as St. Barnabas did when he went from Antioch to Jerusalem. Grace brought forward the map directly, to look for the places, and whilst she was finding them, Harriet whispered to her sister—

"I think Uncle Henry is a great deal more like St. Barnabas than Colonel Clive is!"

"Yes, that he is," said Philip, who had heard the observation.

"Symonds says that Colonel Clive makes Agatha cry: and I dare say St. Barnabas never made any one cry."

Margaret was both perplexed and annoyed. "I don't see how Symonds can tell about anything at Ashington," she replied; "so it is very foolish for him to talk; but, you know, I cry, and we all cry sometimes."

"And Philip cried yesterday," exclaimed Grace, laughing.

Philip's cheek was crimsoned in an instant.

"But St. Barnabas would not have laughed at him about it, Grace," said Margaret; "what he would have done would have been to comfort him, to console him; because he is called—what?"

"The son of Consolation," answered Grace, with more timidity than usual.

"Then, because it is the feast of St. Barnabas, we will all try and be like sons of consolation. We will see how kind we can be to one another."

Margaret closed her book, the children came round her for the kiss with which the Scripture reading was always concluded, and then the few half-holiday lessons proceeded. Margaret liked to think it was the feast of St. Barnabas. She had learnt to take pleasure in festival days, to associate agreeable things with them; some additional leisure and favourite pursuits, with which she indulged herself; and it was satisfactory also to know that the children were not growing up, as she had done, without signs and land-marks for the year. Margaret had begun her system with them gradually, as its benefits and necessity had been perceived when tried upon herself. She had, in her own case, carefully followed her uncle's directions with regard to the fasts and festivals of the Church, and she was becoming more and more sensible of their good effect upon her tone of mind; how they gave a fixed direction to her meditations; took her from thoughts of herself; forced her to look more carefully into the Bible, to study characters, and bring out particular points bearing upon them; and how, by degrees, they were weaning her from exclusiveness and solitariness of feeling, and showing her that she was one of a mighty body, deriving its existence from centuries gone by, and destined to carry its future life into eternity. Without daily services; without a clergyman at hand to assist her; without the advantage of early instruction in Church principles, Margaret

was yet growing day by day in practice, though not always in feeling, a consistent daughter of the English Church. She read the appointed psalms and lessons morning and evening, not as a form, but as the specified instructions of the Church, and with a view of keeping up, as much as possible, the sense of unity and communion with those who were more happily circumstanced. She fixed her rule of discipline, and adhered to it with sufficient strictness to assure herself of sincerity, though not without many times falling into the temptations of which her uncle had spoken. She set aside the tenth part of her yearly allowance, as the tithe required by God for charitable purposes; more she gave, if possible, but this was the lowest amount; and in all these things there was a sense of order and submission which to an imaginative mind was peculiarly beneficial. It was true that the psalms and lessons did not meet every particular frame of mind; but because she read them, there was no reason why she should not besides turn to the passages which were peculiarly applicable to the moment; and the external rule was often a means of teaching her the peculiar fitness and beauty of every part of the Bible; its power of adaptation to all varieties of temper and circumstance, since historical events or obscure prophecies, which she would never have selected herself, thus brought lessons of instruction to her heart. Charles the First, when preparing for a violent death, is not the only person who has found the lesson for the day so exactly suited to his need as to appear providentially appointed to meet it. Under such a system, Margaret's mind was becoming gradually more subdued and equable; but the world saw little of it. She had always been cheerful, and agreeable, and energetic; and this she was still. It was in the quietness of her own mind that Margaret felt the change. She could bend to her mother's watchfulness and interference, because obedience was now becoming her habitual temper; and she could bear with the children's faults, because she felt keenly alive to her own. Some things, indeed, were still serious trials. Such had been, at first, Mrs. Percival's objections to the children's having half-holidays to mark the festival days, and reading the epistle and gospel appointed. Margaret was for the moment inclined to be hopeless of ever doing anything towards imbuing them with Church principles; but she yielded with a good grace, and comforted herself by "making known her request" where she knew it could not but be heard; and soon afterwards Mrs. Percival was brought to consent. George had come to his sister's aid, and declared it was a common practice at public schools to

keep saints' days, so that there could be nothing popish in it; and Mrs. Percival having no better ground for objection, at length gave up the point. There were other difficulties in the practice of the Church, as exhibited before her, which often weighed upon Margaret's mind, and were, in fact, her great danger and stumblingblock. They served to weaken her imperfect faith, and to make her at times captious and discontented; but this evil was, as yet, hidden from her own view. The spirit of criticism brought few visibly bad results, for Margaret herself obeyed whilst she complained of the general laxity; but it stood in the way of any real reverence for the Church; and her obedience was not sufficiently profound to be satisfying. Still this was but the germ of unhappiness, and Margaret's chief trial now arose from a very different source—Agatha's countenance was betraying the secret of a wretched home. Unquiet spirits, forced merriment, constant society, and perpetual demands for change of scene, were the too certain indications that domestic peace was wanting. Symonds had reported truly, when he said that the Colonel made his wife cry. Agatha's was not the spirit to submit meekly, nor, indeed, to show that she submitted at all. She braved her husband when they were together, but she gave full vent to her bitterness of spirit when alone; and the servants, who always contrive to know what their masters and mistresses desire to hide, reported that Mrs. Clive spent hours locked up in her room, sobbing; and often pretended a headache, merely because she could not make up her mind to meet her husband. Agatha might have borne opposition in great things, but it was the pettiness of her husband's obstinacy which exasperated her. Having no occupation, and no tastes, he had full leisure to inquire into his household economy; and, with the assistance of Mrs. St. Aubyn, he made himself acquainted with its most minute details. All this, however, Agatha might have endured, if she had not been ashamed of him. After sacrificing private happiness for public admiration, she found that she had purchased public censure and contempt. Eyes were fixed upon her when she walked or drove, and voices murmured when she entered a room, but it was not to point out the lovely wife of the man of fortune, but to cast a slur upon the cold-hearted girl who had sold herself for the sake of a tinsel splendour. The world has no respect for its worshippers, and even when it most smiles upon them, it is the most inclined to make sport of their folly. Margaret had had little real intercourse with her sister. They had been parted during the spring months, which Colonel Clive always spent in

London; but Agatha was now returned, looking fagged and unhappy. Ashington was to be filled with visitors during the summer, and there was a hope that constant society might be a preservative to her peace of mind, or, at least, divert her; but the disease was, in reality, incurable. Agatha was wearied beyond endurance by a domestic tête-a-tête, and irritated to an equal degree by watching her husband in company. How it was to end, Margaret could not see; she could scarcely hope that it would be well, for the suffering had been purchased wilfully.

But there were happy thoughts in Margaret's mind on the bright festival of St. Barnabas, which soon chased away all of a sadder hue. Even when she remembered poor Rhoda and her sufferings, she remembered also that the Countess Novera was at hand to assist her. Margaret had been delighting herself for some weeks with the prospect of the Countess's return, and had heard from her directly she arrived. She intended, if possible, to walk to Henningsley in the afternoon; but a second note from Beatrice, received before the children's lessons were finished, made her apply at once to her mother for permission to go alone. Mrs. Percival demurred, which was her usual custom: she said that it was very inconvenient; that the children would do mischief in the garden; that she was not inclined to take them out herself; —but all these were merely the objections of habit, and very well pleased in her heart that Margaret should be in the Countess's confidence, she at last gave her consent.

CHAPTER XL.

Father Andrea was seen walking in the park, as Margaret approached the lodge at Henningsley. He had apparently been expecting her, for he came towards her immediately, and shook hands with marked cordiality. Lucia was with him; but her manner was strikingly different. She bowed coldly, and replied in few words to Margaret's civilities, and some minutes afterwards, with a slight apology, turned away towards a gardener's cottage. Margaret could not help wondering at the charm which Mrs. St. Aubyn had found in a person so unconciliating; but Lucia had never particularly attracted her notice, and she soon forgot her in the pleasure of again speaking to Father Andrea. The confessor was anxious and curious to discover whether any

portion of the influence, which he thought he had acquired, had been lost during his absence. He had read all Margaret's letters, but they were not unreserved enough to give him the full knowledge of her character which he desired. Her admiration of Massillon even was confined to general terms; and though in occasional sentences he had discovered, as he said to the Countess, that she still took an interest in the Romish Church, it was not sufficient to give him more than a general hope of at length gaining his end.

"We have been absent longer than we had anticipated," he said, in answer to Margaret's expressions of pleasure at seeing Henningsley again inhabited.

"The Countess was detained in London some weeks; but she has been longing to be at home."

"And can she really think this her home?" said Margaret. "It has always been my fear that no such place could be found for her in any country but Italy."

"The Countess has a buoyant, energetic mind," replied the confessor. "She can make a home wherever she can make duties; and there is much to attach her to England — to Henningsley especially."

"She is so kind to the poor," said Margaret.

"And Miss Percival is so kind during her absence. The Countess is most desirous to thank you for your attention to that poor girl."

Margaret blushed, but felt pleased. "It has been very little that I could do," she said. "Bodily relief the Countess has given fully, and for other things there was too great a barrier between us."

"And why so?" inquired the confessor. "Human nature and human feelings are the same in Catholics and Protestants."

"But spiritual feelings are not," replied Margaret.

"It may be so," continued Father Andrea; "but it is a harsh opinion which you entertain of us, Miss Percival, if you think that we cannot value charity, let it come from whom it may, or that we do not take the deepest — yes," he added earnestly, "the very deepest interest in those who are separated from us so widely."

"Rhoda Newbolt is a person to attract sympathy from all persons," said Margaret.

"She is a very peculiar character," replied Father Andrea; "raised by her tone of mind — I might add by her religion — above her natural station, yet retaining a great simplicity, which is scarcely to be found in the higher ranks of life."

Margaret was aware that she should soon be led into unreserve

if this conversation continued. Father Andrea's manner was so paternal, and yet so courteous and respectful, that against her will it influenced her, whenever she was in his company. For a short space she imposed silence upon herself, being determined that on this, their first meeting after months of absence, she would not be induced to enter upon any but common subjects. It was always painful to her to feel that she had been led to speak of herself to any person whom she had not long known, yet the confessor's tone of conversation always seemed to lead to this point. Even when discoursing upon general subjects, he appeared still to have in view the character of the particular person whom he was addressing; and this tacit avowal of an acquaintance with the hidden thoughts exercised a species of fascination over his hearers. Margaret had experienced it when he described the missions of the Jesuits, appealing, as if by an intuitive knowledge of her disposition, to the vivid imagination which was so often leading her astray; and now he seemed about to seize upon her sympathy in the poor girl, to extract from it some better acquaintance of the light in which she regarded the members of the Romish Church. Margaret did not see any design in this; she only thought that Father Andrea was a person to draw her out of herself, and that she would be upon her guard against him. But the silence was understood, it was a thoughtful one, and Father Andrea was well pleased that Margaret should be sensible of his power.

"I see the Countess in the garden," he said, as they drew near the house; "I will leave her to tell you her request alone. When you have determined whether you will be able to assist us, I shall be most willing to lend my aid also."

He opened the gate into the shrubbery, bowed, and withdrew; and Margaret advanced to meet the Countess.

"I thought you would come," exclaimed Beatrice, as with a foreign eagerness of manner which, in the present instance, suited well with her real feelings, she took Margaret's hand in both hers.

"Your note was a command," said Margaret.

"I was sure it would be so to you; other persons, with your constant engagements, might have excused themselves."

"But not in a case of charity," said Margaret; "though I must own," she added, with a smile, "that it was charity to myself which was the great inducement. I did indeed wish much to see you."

The Countess again pressed her hand warmly, and led the way to the terrace.

"I could talk to you of many things," she said, "and ask many

questions, but I will not lose the time now. You were walking with Father Andrea—has he told you why I wished to see you?"

"No," replied Margaret; "but I conjectured it must be something concerning Rhoda Newbolt. She is sinking rapidly."

"Yes, so Father Andrea has informed me. He is anxious to take a strange step; he wishes her to be removed here; but how will it be possible?"

"In her present state!" exclaimed Margaret, "she could scarcely bear it."

"It is not that so much: I think we might contrive some means of effecting her removal if it were determined on; but I fear her family will not hear of it."

"No," replied Margaret; "they are more than ever distressed at her ——"

She stopped; but the Countess took up the sentence and added, —

"Her conversion. You need not be afraid of hurting me. We, who believe we are in possession of the truth, can well bear with a difference of opinion."

Truth! the word forced itself into Margaret's mind, there to haunt her memory, and to awaken again the question which of late had slumbered, and which she thought was answered,—where truth was to be found.

"Father Andrea has had a difficulty in proposing this scheme," the Countess continued; "it will involve much care and trouble to myself and my household; but on talking it over with him, I see that he has, as usual, benevolence and right judgment on his side. Where the poor girl now is, her dying hours must be harassed by contention, and she will probably be debarred from the last rites of religion. No sacrifice of mine can be what such a trial would be for her; and even if it were not so, she is my equal, my sister in the sight of God."

Margaret looked upon the Countess's lovely face, and marvelled that she should ever have traced in it a taint of pride. But it was not the pride of station which was the temptation of the highborn, carefully nurtured daughter of the Viscount de Lisle. Beatrice could humble herself to her inferiors, she could be courteous and considerate to her acquaintances, she could throw aside distinctions of rank, and love, even as she now was beginning to love Margaret Percival; but she exacted in return, submission to her will and deference to her opinion. The pride of a commanding spirit was the failing point in her character, and this had never, in Margaret's sight, been brought into view.

"I would go myself and make this request," pursued the Countess, "if I could foresee any probability of doing good; but my mere presence would be obnoxious, and Father Andrea dares not now enter the cottage. Our only hope is in ——"

"Me!" exclaimed Margaret; "but upon what grounds could I place it?"

"You may urge," replied Beatrice, "that it is in vain to hope for any change of faith now; that it can only be wretchedness to the parents to be with their daughter, when there is so little accordance of opinion; and you may suggest that, as my tenants, they are bound to have some respect for my wishes. The last argument, I have reason to think, may be a cogent one with the father."

"And Rhoda herself?" said Margaret.

"You must, of course, consult her first; but I have scarcely a doubt as to her consent. A person whom we could trust went to the cottage this morning, and learnt that she is lying still and without much pain, but greatly distressed in mind. Her mother's violence at such a time must be scarcely endurable."

"And if I can prevail upon her to accept the offer, when may I say you are prepared to receive her?"

"Immediately. I have already given the necessary orders, and in the course of a few hours all will be ready for her."

"She will die here," said Margaret, thoughtfully.

"Yes, but she will die in peace."

"I was not thinking of her," continued Margaret.

"Nor of my comfort, I hope," exclaimed the Countess.

"Nor exactly of that," replied Margaret; "and yet it was something connected with it. I am afraid I should not have considered such a duty incumbent upon me."

"Father Andrea shall tell us which can lay claim to the highest virtue," said the Countess, lightly, as she went to meet the confessor, who just then appeared in the garden,—"you for braving Mrs. Newbolt's fury, or I, for simply allowing her daughter to occupy a room in my house. But seriously," she added, assuming a different tone, "we are both, I hope, wishing to be of use, and yours may be the greater effort of the two."

Margaret could not agree. To follow in the wake of benevolence was not, she thought, equal to setting the example; and she would have fallen into a reverie upon the comparative probability of Protestants' and Romanists' kindness of heart, but for the presence of the Countess and the approach of the confessor. The plan of proceeding was soon settled. Margaret was to go directly

to the cottage, and endeavour to obtain a private interview with Rhoda, which, as she was now wholly confined to her bed-room, was not likely to be difficult. If she consented to the proposed arrangement, Margaret was then to use her utmost tact in endeavouring to gain Mrs. Newbolt's permission for her daughter's immediate removal to Henningsley. As she left the Countess, Margaret pondered upon the curious, yet natural concurrence of circumstances, which had thus brought her into co-operation with persons whose religion was different from her own. She was not exactly satisfied with the position which she occupied, though she did not see how it could have been avoided. Her uncle would certainly think it strange if he knew how she had gradually gained the Countess's confidence, and was now working with her; perhaps he might not approve. Margaret regretted her first reserve; it had prevented her from obtaining a clear idea of his opinions, when he said that there was danger in an intimacy with a Romanist. Yet she could not absolutely blame herself; she had meant no harm, and she did not see that any harm would arise from it. In the present case she was undoubtedly doing a deed of charity. The idea of changing Rhoda's belief, at such a time of suffering, seemed preposterous; and if it were right, she was not the person to attempt it. All that lay in her power was to assist in soothing the poor girl's dying moments, and to place her, if possible, amongst friends who would minis er to her bodily and spiritual wants. With such thoughts Margaret entered the cottage. The lower room was empty, and the only sounds to be heard were the ticking of the clock, and the short, almost incessant cough of the suffering girl, immediately above. Margaret softly called the names of Mrs. Newbolt and her youngest daughter; but receiving no answer, she opened the door at the foot of the steep little staircase, and went up. The chamber was small, and less scrupulously neat than might have been expected from the appearance of the apartment below. It showed that the comfort of the invalid was neglected, and Margaret knew how much annoyance even this alone would cause. Rhoda was sitting up in her bed, supported by pillows. Her face was now so thin and pale, as scarcely to retain any trace of its former expression; her sunken eyes were glaringly brilliant, and a deep shadow marked their outline, as well as that of the black, feverish lips. Margaret was conscious of a change even since she had last seen her.

"Poor Rhoda, you are very ill," she said, as she went up to the bed-side, and took hold of the attenuated hand which rested on the coverlid.

"Very," was the whispered answer; "worse since you were here;" and then Margaret only caught the words, "soon over," for a fit of coughing interrupted the sentence.

"You must not attempt to talk, Rhoda," said Margaret, whilst she drew a chair near, and sat down. "If you could listen to me, it might not do you any harm."

"Harm! no, good;" and Rhoda half smiled.

Margaret held up her finger for silence, and went on: "It grieves me so to see you in this state, Rhoda; and I want to do you good if I can; to make you happier. Yes, I know what you would say," she added, as the poor girl feebly shook her head. "I know what you suffer; all the pain, and fever, and coughing; I cannot help that; but if you were not here, you might be able to have the prayers you require, and that would be a blessing."

Rhoda's eyes were raised for a moment with an expression of fervent devotion, and then a mist gathered over them, and tears rolled slowly down her cheek.

Margaret wiped them away for her, and said: "If you were not here you would be better in mind; and I think, perhaps, I might be able to manage a change, if I could gain your mother's consent."

Rhoda looked at her attentively whilst she spoke; but at the last words she turned away her face in evident disappointment.

"I only want to know whether you would like it; whether you would go to Henningsley, if the Countess Novera could receive you."

"No, no, too grand! not for me!" whispered Rhoda, her trembling hand and eager eye showing how greatly she was agitated by the proposal.

Margaret was distressed, and afraid that she had been mistaken in her plan of proceeding. But Father Andrea had advised it, under the idea that Mrs. Newbolt's anger when first the proposal should be made, might otherwise deter her daughter from openly expressing her inclinations.

"But if the Countess wishes it, Rhoda," continued Margaret, "you would not refuse her?"

"She cannot," said Rhoda hastily; "I must die."

Her head drooped, as if she were almost exhausted; and Margaret, taking a bottle of scent from her reticule, endeavoured to refresh her by touching her forehead with it.

"So very kind," said Rhoda, trying to look up again.

"I would do anything for you, Rhoda," replied Margaret; "but you would be much better off at Henningsley. If you

would only say that you wish to go, I will try to persuade your mother to consent."

"Too much happiness," whispered Rhoda; and then, whilst her eyes flashed eagerly, she added, so energetically as to startle Margaret,—"The blessing of Heaven be upon you both!"

Rhoda's gratitude was received in silence; and returning to the subject of her visit, Margaret continued: "Perhaps your mother will be here shortly, and I can try what she will say, if you do not object; but I must hear your answer first. The Countess is having a room prepared for you, and she will send her carriage to fetch you; and when you are there, Father Andrea will be near you to pray for you, and to give you—" Margaret paused—she felt herself in a false position. How could it be her business to act the part of a Romanist?—Rhoda moved her lips in answer, and Margaret stooped forward to catch the words which she uttered.

"Only decide, yes or no," she added; "that is all."

Rhoda said something about the rites of the Church, and Margaret, believing that it would be her greatest inducement, reminded her that the last sacrament of extreme unction would, perhaps, be denied her, if she remained where she was. Again, whilst she spoke the words, her heart reproached her as if she were in some way a traitor to her own Church. Rhoda did not need to be reminded of that which for weeks had daily and nightly been a burden upon her spirits; and was about to reply, when her mother's voice was heard below.

"Keep her away," she said, quickly; and then feebly clasping her hands, she added,—"May God pardon me! she is my mother."

"Yes," replied Margaret; "you owe her every duty; but you will never be at peace whilst you remain here; at Henningsley she may come and see you. Shall I ask her now?"

Rhoda pointed to the door, and murmuring, "If you will:—our Lord and the Holy Virgin reward you for your kindness!" she closed her eyes, and her lips moved as if in prayer. Margaret lingered for a moment, unwilling to leave her alone; but finding that she remained tranquil, and without taking any further notice of her presence, went down stairs.

The part which she had now to act was a difficult one; and her first precaution was to close the door at the foot of the stairs, that poor Rhoda might not be disturbed by the violence of temper which she fully expected to encounter.

Mrs. Newbolt, however, was in a particularly placid humour, and the conversation at first proceeded very amicably.

Margaret heard a minute history of Rhoda's sufferings, and did not attempt to stop the lamentations over her fatal delusions, little as she could join in them.

Mrs. Newbolt's own errors appeared much greater than her daughter's; and Margaret's sympathies were so aroused for the latter, that although Rhoda's concluding words had startled her, as expressions of a similar kind had often done before, she could not bear to believe that they involved any essential mistake in doctrine; and whilst Mrs. Newbolt ran on in her ordinary strain of ignorance and self-conceit, she began to consider whether, after all, there was any harm in seeking the intercession of her who had been "highly-favoured," and "blessed among women," and to doubt whether Romanists did, in reality, carry their reverence too far.

Mrs. Newbolt at last ceased speaking; and then Margaret ventured to say that, however distressing it might be to a mother to know that her child was dying in error, it was too late to endeavour to change her opinions; all that could be done was to make her as easy as circumstances would allow. To this, however, Mrs. Newbolt would not agree.

"She would never despair," she said; "nothing should hinder her from bearing testimony to the truth, even to the last minute of her child's life."

If this speech had been made by a Romanist, Margaret might have considered it worthy of admiration for its zeal; as coming from an extravagant Dissenter, it seemed only fanaticism.

"You must be in a great deal of trouble," she said; "it seems a pity that Rhoda should have been brought here at all."

"Yes, pity indeed! but it wasn't my doing; 'twas her father, and all the neighbours. I knew 'twould be the death of me when I said yes."

Margaret with difficulty refrained from a smile, as she looked at the portly figure and florid complexion before her. Death from worry of mind was probably the last event which would have been prophesied for Mrs. Newbolt.

"If there were any prospect of convincing Rhoda that she is wrong," she replied, "there might be some reason for talking to her upon the subject; but, as it is, it certainly seems to me, that it would be better both for you and for her that she should be in some other situation, if she were well enough to be moved."

Mrs. Newbolt's glance was one of suspicion; but Dr. Percival's family were such decided Protestants, that however she might condemn them on other points, as blind followers of a formal

Church, she could not suppose them to be in league with Romanists. Margaret guessed what was passing in her mind, and saw at once that openness would be her wisest course.

"I dare say you will think it very strange, Mrs. Newbolt," she said; "but I cannot help believing that you would be happier. I have been commissioned to ask whether you would consent to Rhoda's being removed, in case she is willing and able to bear the fatigue?"

"Moved, where to? Who's to take a child from her parents?" exclaimed Mrs. Newbolt; the latent affection of a mother aroused at such a proposal.

Margaret mildly explained that there was not the least notion of using force; that it was merely a plan for her consideration; and she then mentioned the Countess Novera's name, stating her wishes, and assuring Mrs. Newbolt that every possible care would be taken of her daughter, and that she herself would be able to see her at any moment. "The Countess," she added, "would not have mentioned such a thing, had she not known how much distress Rhoda's religious belief must cause to her family, and considered it probable that all parties would be more comfortable if they were separate."

Margaret had thought herself fully prepared for the storm which was to follow; but she was mistaken. No imagination such as hers could equal the reality. Coarse abuse, and violent condemnation, and peremptory refusals made her at first repent her boldness; but between the short pauses, Rhoda's racking cough was heard in the room above, and Margaret, remembering what she would have to bear if the plan failed, still stood her ground. After the lapse of twenty minutes, she was almost about to give up the attempt, when an unexpected assistant came to her support. It was the father; a cool-judging, hard-minded man, a Wesleyan in name, but scarcely adhering to any particular belief in practice. Margaret had always supposed him to be controlled by his wife, and so he was in many cases, in which merely the peace of his household was concerned; but in the present instance there was something more important at stake—the displeasure of the Countess Novera.

He had no sooner heard the request, and that it came from her, than he threw the weight of his influence into Margaret's scale. Mrs. Newbolt grew more exasperated; Margaret more patient and hopeful; and after the discussion of another quarter of an hour, the desired consent was extorted. Margaret could not make up her mind to leave the cottage; she felt her presence necessary as a

protection to Rhoda; and sending a boy to Henningsley with a pencil note, saying that she had gained her point, and would wait the arrival of the carriage, she once more resumed her station by the sick bed.

CHAPTER XLI.

MARGARET did not return home till late in the afternoon, and it was not before she sat down to rest in her own room that she recollected they were to dine at Ashington. A family party had been invited; but she knew what that invitation meant, when the house was crowded with fashionable visitors; and, sorely against her inclination, she began to dress. Such an engagement could scarcely have fallen at a more inopportune moment. Far different thoughts from those of gaiety and society were in Margaret's mind. Features of suffering, a feeble voice, a glassy, sunken eye, were present to her, varied only by the pitying form and the soothing accents of the Countess Novera, and the fervent tones of Father Andrea's prayers, as he knelt to ask that the blessing of Heaven and the consolations provided by his Church might be granted to her who was so soon to depart this mortal life. Margaret had seen and heard all. She had assisted in the removal of poor Rhoda from her mother's cottage, and had been admitted into the room prepared for her at Henningsley. She was allowed to be useful, called upon for advice, in every way made one of the family, and even more;—a person of importance, whose aid was really needed. The flattery was too delicate to be resisted. Margaret's compassion for Rhoda was overpowered by her pleasure in being thus permitted to advance so many degrees in the Countess's confidence. She neither wished for, nor would accept of thanks, and when at length they parted, it was with the promise that nothing, if possible, should prevent her from being at Henningsley again on the following day.

An evening at Ashington would harmonise ill with the scenes she had witnessed; and the society at Ashington would be as little likely to suit her taste, after the hours spent with the Countess; for Margaret's Church principles did not as yet succeed in rendering her always charitable in her judgments, or willing to make allowances for that which to her appeared wrong. Too often, they brought great trials to her faith. After working for months to bring her own mind into order, she was naturally

more alive to any discordance of principles in others. She looked about for support, congeniality, unity; but they were nowhere to be found,—at least, by her. Of such things, indeed, she occasionally heard and read: and she believed, that the rules which guided her, guided also many similarly circumstanced; but she was alone, as to intercourse, except with her uncle. He was to her the impersonation of the Church; and scarcely any one else seemed to belong to it. When she examined also the opinions which were spreading in different directions, they did not satisfy her. Some were too cautious, others too vague. There appeared to be a general awakening, a searching after truth, which mostly ended in the discovery of error. That this state of things must be the necessary result of a reaction after a long state of torpor, Margaret did not understand. She was impatient of imperfection, both in herself and her fellow-beings, and all Mr. Sutherland's advice and remonstrance failed in bringing her to submit humbly and patiently. He looked upon it as a judgment from Heaven upon the sins of past and present generations; as a discipline for his own heart; a call for prayer, and energy, and self-denial. Margaret chafed and fretted; and whilst she carefully watched her own private conduct, still thought it no harm to complain of the defects of the Church at large, and at times, of the negligence of private individuals. Mr. Sutherland now and then grew anxious about her; he saw that she was hasty in deciding upon public questions; and her expressions, however in general kept under control by the retiring unobtrusive character of her mind, were still, when made to him alone, exaggerated. And yet it was difficult to check her. The circumstances in which she was placed were very trying, and the defects and omissions of which she complained were true, and deeply to be deplored. He could himself look at them unshrinkingly, for his faith was strong, and his belief in the presence of God with His Church, was unwavering; but for a young girl just entering upon a new course of life, and above all things needing, or seeming to need, external support, such a confidence could scarcely be expected. The more clearly Margaret recognised the authority and beauty of the Church in theory, the more earnestly did she desire to see both exhibited in practice. Exert herself for the Church she did in her own limited sphere, by training the children, and whenever it was possible, suggesting right principles to the poor, and to the servants, or whoever might be placed within the range of her influence. But Margaret's mind could have taken a large grasp. She had talents, and energies, and powers

which burned within her, and would fain have exercise in some great scheme of usefulness; and consciousness of what she might be, if only the opportunity were afforded her, aroused her imagination, she could find a way to satisfy her only in the ideal which she had formed of the Romish Church. The events of the day, spent in the service, it might be called, of the Countess Novera, had given her an additional bias. The persons for whom, and with whom we work, and to whom we are enabled to give comfort, exercise over us a powerful influence. Margaret had a much greater sympathy with Romanists, after being united with them in an act of charity, than she would probably have had after weeks of ordinary acquaintance. They accorded with her tone of mind, more than any persons whom she had ever known, her uncle alone excepted. As to the gay world at Ashington, she thought of it with disgust. One hour passed with the Countess, she could almost have said one hour with Rhoda Newbolt, would be more precious to her than all the flattering attentions and cheerful amusements which might meet her elsewhere.

But Margaret was not destined to the trial of uncongenial dissipation on that evening. A duty of a different kind awaited her. She was sitting in her room expecting the carriage, when Baker came to deliver a message from Mrs. Percival:

"She wished to see Miss Margaret immediately."

Margaret concluded that it was to give some order about the children: but no — Mrs. Percival was reading a little twisted note, written in a trembling hand: "Miss Debrett has just sent over to me, Margaret, my dear, and really I don't know what to do. She says she is very unwell, poor thing! and wants to know if you can go to her: but it is impossible; we cannot disappoint Agatha."

"I hardly see why we should be so very particular," replied Margaret, whose pleasure, at the prospect of escaping an Ashington dinner party made her regard with complacency even a tête-a-tête with Miss Debrett.

"Certainly, it is only a family party," said Mrs. Percival; "but you are dressed my dear,—it seems such a pity: and that new silk, just let me see how it sits."

Margaret threw off her shawl, and submitted to the inspection, which was pronounced to be satisfactory. The new dress-maker had fitted her remarkably well, and Mrs. Percival said to herself that Margaret was a very sweet-looking girl. To Agatha such praise would have been given aloud.

"But the dress does not signify, mamma," said Margaret. "I may have a great many better opportunities of wearing it; and I would much rather stay with Miss Debrett if she wants me."

"Why, my dear, want you, she assuredly does; she would not have written else. But there is nothing easier than to send an excuse. I don't know, indeed, how you can help it."

"Agatha cannot care," said Margaret; "it seems almost absurd to stand upon such ceremony with one's sister."

"It is not Agatha, my dear, but the Colonel. You know he always settles the numbers, and who shall go into dinner together; and if he is put out in these things it does not do."

"No," said Margaret, with unconscious emphasis, "that it certainly does not. But may I look at Miss Debrett's note?"

Mrs. Percival put it into her hand. It was very short, but written nervously and urgently, and Margaret saw that it would be unkind to refuse. She mentioned the possibility of some other person being a defaulter equally with herself, in which case there would be no inconvenience to Colonel Clive; or, if this should not be, she thought, that by going early her mother might be able to pacify him before dinner was announced. Mrs. Percival gave permission at last, and Margaret went back to her room to take off her elegant dress, and prepare for spending the long summer evening with the weak, fanciful invalid.

And it was very long at first—longer than Margaret had often known such evenings. She found Miss Debrett in a high state of nervous excitement, grieving that she had sent for her, yet professing herself unequal to bear solitude. Margaret satisfied her that she had made no sacrifice in giving up Ashington; and after delivering the usual family bulletin, set herself to the task of diverting a sickly mind. The afternoon sun shone warm and bright into the little parlour, where, leaning back in a shabby, chintz-covered arm-chair, placed near the window, that she might see all that went by, through the half-opened blind, Miss Debrett entertained her companion, whom she stationed on a black horse-hair sofa near her, with the history of her maladies and her fears. Yet Margaret listened with more than patience; she was fulfilling a duty—doing some visible good; and she could find an interest in details related by almost any one. They gave her subjects for speculation at the time, and food for after-thought. Miss Debrett's life, though simple and uneventful, was always a mystery to her. Purposeless it appeared, and useless, except so far as her scanty means enabled her to relieve a few of the poor,

yet, doubtless, holding some important place in the invisible scheme of Providence, which no other could occupy. Margaret did not then perceive the good which such persons effect, if it were only by their claims upon others; or the consideration might have assisted in solving some difficulties as to the lingering lives even of individuals whose faculties are gone, and whose bodily frame seems already fitted for the grave.

"I am better now, my dear," said Miss Debrett, when Susan had placed the tea-things upon the table. "Having some one to talk to amuses me, and Susan is not much of a companion now, she is so cast down about her sister."

"Rhoda is dying, I believe," replied Margaret; "but she will be much more comfortable in her illness than could have been expected. The Countess Novera has had her removed to Henningsley."

"Has she indeed? How very good of her! But then she is a Catholic, and so I suppose they seem all one."

"Yes," said Margaret, "and Father Andrea will be there to be a comfort to her."

"Father Andrea? that's the confessor, I suppose. Those Catholic priests are indefatigable. Susan told me the other day how it was that Rhoda came to turn, and it was all through one of them."

"Was it?" said Margaret, with increased interest.

"Yes; you know she was living at Eastlake before the new clergyman came, or St. James's church was built; and she never liked the Baptists, and after her first illness took a fancy to go to church; but when she had been there a few times she caught a cold, because there was no good place for her, and she was obliged to sit in a draught; and so, when one of the housemaids asked her to go to the Catholic chapel with her, she thought she might as well."

"And did that convert her?" asked Margaret.

"No, my dear, not that alone; but the priest saw there was a new face, and inquired about her; and he made some of his people get acquainted with her; and at last he used to see her himself, when she went to drink tea with her Catholic friends, and he lent her books and tracts, and sometimes he used to frighten her, and tell her she never would go to heaven if she was not a Catholic; and so he brought her quite round."

Margaret sighed, and in her heart wondered what miracle would effect such a change in Mr. Stanley, as to induce him to exert himself equally in making a convert.

"I must say the Catholics talk very hardly," continued Miss Debrett; "that is one of the things I can't bear in them. To my mind, every one should have his own way of thinking."

"But some people think very wrongly," said Margaret.

"Yes, my dear, so they do; but I don't mean of course that any one may think they may tell falsehoods, or commit murder; but I mean we may all have our own opinions."

Margaret was not inclined to answer, for Miss Debrett's reasonings, or rather attempts at reasoning, were of that slippery nature, it was hopeless to grasp them.

"I should not care half as much for all the dreadful things the Catholics believe," continued Miss Debrett, "if they did not want others to believe the same; but that is what I call uncharitable. They all do, though, and I dare say the Countess Novera thinks just as badly of you and me, Margaret, as if we were heathens."

"No, indeed," replied Margaret; but she did not say all that she wished, for there was something which restrained her from showing that she was in any way intimate at Henningsley.

"Then she is very unlike all her family," pursued Miss Debrett. "They were always fixed to their faith, and would not hear of any one else being right; and they are a proud family, you know, my love; and that has helped to make them particular."

"I cannot discover what reason there is for calling them proud," replied Margaret. "I have never seen anything but kindness in the Countess; and I am sure nothing could be more humble and gentle than her behaviour to poor Rhoda Newbolt."

"They are proud, my dear. I used to hear it said when I was a child; and I know that when the Countess was a little girl, just before they went to Italy, she made every one do exactly as she wished; and if they refused, she would stamp her little foot, and look as grand as a queen. I don't mean to say anything against her now," she added, observing Margaret's grave face; "I dare say she may be altered, and as you say, she has been extremely kind to the poor Catholic girl; but that may be, you know, because of her religion."

Margaret did not in general consider Miss Debrett uncharitable; but in the present case she was strongly disposed to believe her so. "What instances have they ever given of pride?" she inquired, "or is it only prejudice?"

"As to instances, my love, I can't remember: it is a long time since they left England. But every one says so; and you know the Viscountess that hangs over the dining-room was made up of it."

"What! the beautiful picture?" exclaimed Margaret, eagerly. "I never heard who she was, or anything about her."

"Very likely not, because there are few people living here still who care anything for the family: but that picture is—I don't know how old exactly—two—three—yes, about three hundred years: she was a De Lisle herself, which made me mention her, and she married her first cousin when she was quite young, not above seventeen."

"But about her pride," said Margaret, anxious to keep to the point.

"Why, my dear, it was Catholic pride; just that which has made them all Catholics since, as I heard Mr. Prior say the other day, when we were talking of them. She never would listen to any Protestant notions, and she seldom let a Protestant come within her gates. Her husband was a meek man, and rather set against her ways of going on; but she carried everything before her. They had two children, a son, and a daughter just such as the Countess might be. By some means, I don't exactly know how, the daughter read some Protestant books, and the Bible, and the end of it was that she said she must turn Protestant."

Miss Debrett stopped, moved her chair, stroked her cat, rang for some more toast, and then remarked that the evenings were so long it was quite economical in candles.

"But about the Viscountess de Lisle?" inquired Margaret, fearing lest the thread of the discourse should be irrecoverably lost.

"Ah! my dear, you shall hear; but we will just wait one minute: I am so thirsty—feverish I suspect."

Margaret poured out the desired cup of tea, but still was obliged to wait. Anne would be in in another minute with the toast, and then Miss Debrett said she would go on. The toast came, and after insisting that Margaret ate nothing, and had lost her appetite, Miss Debrett was induced to continue. "What was I saying, my dear?—oh! just about Rachel de Lisle's turning;—so it was. Well, you know, I can't tell you what the Viscountess said when she first heard about it, because no one was by, that I am aware of; but the story goes, that her daughter was shut up for three days in one of the old turrets, and that, when she came out, her mother bade her give up her Bible, and all her Protestant books, and solemnly vow that she would never look at them again."

"And she did not, of course?" said Margaret.

"Yes, my dear, she did. The Viscountess was one of those persons whom no one dared to disobey, when she really began to

order. The poor young girl was very timid, like her father, and though she had confessed everything at first, when her spirit was up, yet after the three days in that dreadful turret—it is the one fronting the hills to the north—it was not likely that she should keep firm. So she gave up the Bible, and promised to go to confession, and do everything just as before, and the Viscountess said she was satisfied. But that is not all, my dear," continued Miss Debrett, observing that Margaret was wishing to speak. "As was natural enough, after the promise was made, Rachel de Lisle grew so miserable that nothing was ever like it. Quite thin she was, like a skeleton, and so pale, there was not as much colour on her cheek as there is on mine, and that you will say is little enough. But the Viscountess never took any notice, though she must have known well what was the cause. She did not choose it to be supposed that one of the De Lisles could be wishing to turn Protestant, and I suppose she did not think there was any thing serious the matter. So the poor child grew worse and worse, and her mother would not have a doctor called in for fear he should find out the truth; and when the Viscount grew frightened about her, she said it was change of air that was wanted, and they took her away for a little while. It would not do, however; and when they came back to Henningsley the case was worse than ever."

"But how strange," said Margaret, "that the father should not have interfered!"

"You don't know what that Viscountess de Lisle was like, my dear. I used to hear my grandmother talk of her. She just remembered having seen her when she was a very old woman, and she said her look would have governed an army. It was very wild and strange then, as you shall hear. Poor Miss de Lisle grew so ill at last, that no one could doubt she was dying. The Viscountess tried for many days not to believe it; but at last she was obliged to give in, and the doctor was sent for. And when he came, the first thing that the young creature did was to raise herself up in her bed, all weak and trembling as she was, and to say aloud, 'how sinful she had been; that she had never known a moment's happiness since she gave up her Bible; and the best she could do now was to own herself a Protestant, come what might.' They say, Margaret, that the Viscountess's look was dreadful to see. She fell down in a swoon; and when they took her up and recovered her, her senses were gone; whether from grief for having neglected her child so long, or from shame because of her change of religion, no one can tell."

"And her daughter?" said Margaret, eagerly.

"She died that same night, and by her own request was placed in a corner of the family vault, apart from all her nearest relatives. The Viscountess recovered, as far as her strength went, and lived to a very old age; but she was never right in her mind; and all the remembrance that she seemed to have of what was gone by, was when she sat alone in her chamber wringing her hands, and repeating that the glory of the De Lisles was passed."

There was silence when this story was ended. Miss Debrett having been excited to unusual eloquence, sank back in her chair from fatigue, and Margaret leant her head upon her hand, and thought—not merely of the Viscountess de Lisle and her gentle daughter, but of the suffering girl who was then lying on her sick bed at Henningsley, and the harsh mother who had been the cause of her removal. The two histories were alike in some of their main facts; but on the one side there had been no compromise.

"You will own now that they are a proud race," said Miss Debrett, speaking in a languid voice.

"Pride does not seem to me quite the word," said Margaret; "it might have been a mistaken love of truth."

"You are too deep for me, my dear. Whether it was pride or not, it was very cruel."

Margaret did not choose to enter upon the question; but, as the tea-things were removed, she again placed Miss Debrett's chair by the window, and amused her for some time with observations upon the persons who went by; and when the twilight was over, and candles were brought, she proposed reading aloud, as much for relief to herself as for the purpose of interesting her companion. Miss Debrett was soon lulled into a quiet sleep, and Margaret, resuming her work, sat wrapt in her own meditations, until the sound of the church clock at Staunton, striking nine, and the arrival of the manservant, gave notice that her moment of release was come.

"Good night, my love," said Miss Debrett, half waking up, and drowsily insisting that she should be well guarded from the cold.

"Not on this summer night, thank you," said Margaret, laughing.

"How stupid of me to be sure! I was just dreaming about ice; sliding upon it, I think."

"Ice to eat would be the best thing just now," said Margaret.

"Yes, my dear, if I were but rich; but have a glass of wine instead."

Margaret declined all refreshment, and Miss Debrett, now quite awake, kissed her several times, expressed the utmost gratitude for her company, sent many excuses to Agatha, and called after her as she left the room, "You will not think too much of the story, my dear, and dream of Rachel de Lisle."

CHAPTER XLII.

But Margaret did think, notwithstanding, and dream, in spite of the warning. In fancy, that night, whilst she slept, her mind wandered back to years which she had never known, and even her identity was in a manner changed. She was Margaret Percival still, yet the daughter of the haughty Viscountess de Lisle. Henningsley was her home, and a life of honour and enjoyment was opening before her. Then came confused visions of gaiety, and luxury; and suddenly, in the midst of all, she stood in a small turret chamber, with lines of green damp staining the walls, and scarcely a ray of light gleaming through the narrow window. A sense of hopelessness, desolation, and guilt was at her heart; but whilst she was yet unable to discover the cause, the scene changed to a spacious, gorgeously furnished hall, hung with tapestry, and bright with dazzling sunshine. Nobles and priests stood around a lofty throne, on which sat a stern, but noble-looking woman, whose glance awed into silence the retainers who awaited her bidding. Margaret gazed upon her in fear and admiration, and as she gazed, the features faded into indistinctness. It was the Countess Novera before whom she stood; and again, she also had vanished, and the lovely picture which had so riveted her imagination was a breathing reality. Yet Margaret felt that she was in the presence of a commanding spirit, and the consciousness of her own infirmities humbled her to the dust. No word was said; but in a pause of almost breathless expectation, there arose a strain of soft delicious music, which fell upon the ear as the harmony of a sinless world, and lingeringly floated through the vaulted chamber, till its silvery cadences died away in a scarcely audible sound. The lady arose; and Margaret knew the Viscountess de Lisle, and trembled lest she should speak. But once more there was a pause, and then the

tones of music again broke upon the stillness; not soothing and gentle, but full and solemn; a chant in which a hundred voices were mingled in one fervent prayer. Margaret felt herself withdrawn as by a strong arm, and in a distant corner she stood to watch the procession of all who were present, as moving slowly and reverently they passed through the hall into a gallery beyond. Her eye followed them till they were blended in one confused mass, and then, led by a seemingly irresistible impulse, she rushed forward after them. She reached the extremity of the gallery. The crowd had gathered before a raised altar, over which hung a picture of the Virgin, with the infant Saviour in her arms. Every knee was bowed, and every head bent. Margaret thought she was alone amidst strangers. She turned, and Father Andrea was at her side. He pointed in silence to the kneeling multitude, and his eyes were raised to heaven. Margaret sought for the Viscountess de Lisle; but she was gone. Father Andrea took her hand, and there was an expression of command in his countenance as he signed to her to kneel likewise. Margaret's spirit was roused; but, as she would have withdrawn from him, a way seemed to open through the crowd, and the Countess Novera, radiant in beauty, came towards her. Father Andrea moved aside, and the Countess threw herself at her feet. Margaret saw no more. A well-known voice in tones of anguish met her ear, and as she repeated her uncle's name, she awoke. The dream haunted her, and gave a peculiar direction to her thoughts when she recalled the conversation of the preceding evening. Under other circumstances Margaret might have been inclined to sympathise with the unhappy Rachel de Lisle, or, at least, to pity rather than condemn her; but the unperceived bias of her mind towards Romanism led her to view her conduct in another light. Two instances of what might be called persecution had lately been brought before her. Rhoda Newbolt, poor, comparatively ignorant, and uninstructed, had remained firm and unshaken, though tried by coarse abuse and unkindness; whilst, if Miss Debrett's story were true, the daughter of an English nobleman, when converted to the Protestant faith, had weakly yielded to fear, and denied the principles which in her heart she cherished. The consideration of the two cases suggested to Margaret the inquiry, whence did this difference arise? Was it from personal character, or from the distinctive nature of the two systems? Had the dream been a reality, where would have been her own strength? And now, in times of difficulty, what would be the inducements for her, or for any person to remain steadfast to the faith of the

English Church? If men were called upon to die for it, would they be likely to stand the test? Whilst striving to answer these questions satisfactorily, Margaret's thoughts reverted to the authority and grandeur of the Church of Rome; and forgetting the constancy of those who in other days had been martyrs for the reformation of religion, she drew a contrast unfavourable to the English Church, and discouraging to her own mind.

Margaret indeed knew nothing of Romanism in reality; whilst of the Church of England she knew the defects, from what she saw; the excellencies, principally from her own imperfect practice. Had she been aware of her own state, the very doubts which presented themselves might have proved to her that she was unsettled and in peril, and in no condition to entertain such questions. But she seemed only to be indulging her fancy; forming innocent comparisons; whilst she was in truth fostering an irreverent and undutiful tone of mind, and deciding in ignorance upon matters beyond her.

Days fraught with the most important consequences open and often pass, and close, with little to mark them as different from others. Margaret sat down to breakfast with her parents, and heard particulars of the Ashington party; how Agatha looked; who sat at her right hand; and what there was for dinner; and especially, how angry Colonel Clive was at her absence, since it made the numbers uneven.

"I tried to pacify him, my dear," said Mrs. Percival; "but he declared that persons ought to know their own minds; that engagements should never be broken, and a good deal more of the same kind; but you must make friends with him when you meet."

Margaret was rather indifferent upon the subject, for her attention was occupied with other things. She was planning a request for a second visit to Henningsley, whilst uncertain how to word it so as to obtain her mother's permission. Breakfast was nearly over, and the post-bag was brought as usual. Margaret saw her uncle's handwriting, and expecting that he would fix a day for being with them, took up the letter as soon as she could. A little note was lying beside it, which was not in the bag, but had been brought up with it. The direction showed that it was from the Countess Novera. Both seemed to have equal claims; but Margaret opened her uncle's letter first, that her mother's curiosity might be satisfied. The contents did not answer her anticipation.

"Oh! mamma, only think; my uncle is going away."

"What? where?" exclaimed Dr. Percival, turning round suddenly.

"Only for three months, papa."

"Pshaw! nonsense, child. How you frighten one!" and Dr. Percival resumed his newspaper.

"Let me hear, Margaret," said Mrs. Percival, with greater composure.

"It is quite unexpected" answered Margaret; "he says, 'You will be surprised, and — I am selfish enough to hope — sorry, to learn that this must be a leave-taking instead of a promissory note, for we shall probably not meet for some weeks, or months perhaps more correctly. My friend Morland has just lost his wife, and is extremely unwell, though more in mind than in body. Change of air and scene the physicians say he must have, and you know he is not so overburdened with this world's goods as to be able to go wherever he chooses, and provide a curate besides for his little parish. I have written to offer him an exchange for three months, and am going myself to the bishop, to gain his sanction, which there is no doubt of having, as Morland is one of his great favourites.

"'Should this be, as most probably it will, I shall not delay an hour longer than is necessary, and cannot see the least probability of having a day to bestow upon the Grove. Three months, however, will quickly pass, and you must comfort me in the meantime by writing constantly. The change I hope may be beneficial to myself, as I have not been well for some weeks.'"

"So like one of Henry's quixotic plans!" said Mrs. Percival, when Margaret had finished reading.

"And so unsatisfactory!" observed Margaret: "'Not been well for some weeks!' I wonder what that means; he never said anything about it before."

"It is very clear what it means," observed Dr. Percival — "that he has been overworking himself. I prophesied he would do so long ago."

"I wish he could have come over, though only for one day," said Margaret. "It would be a relief to know what is really the matter with him."

"Why, I tell you, my dear, that he has been overworking himself; what can you want more?"

Margaret thought that overworking was a very vague term, including all shades of disease, from a trifling affection of the throat, to the last stage of consumption; and her mind vibrated between the two extremes, inclining rather to the latter. Mrs.

Percival took up the letter to read it again, and Margaret, disappointed and uneasy, opened the note from Henningsley. To her surprise it contained another also for her mother, the purport of which she soon understood. The Countess confessed that she was solitary and out of spirits. Neither Father Andrea nor Lucia could entirely enter into her feelings since she had consented to receive poor Rhoda into her house, with the knowledge that her life could not, except by a miracle, be prolonged beyond a few days. "I have done what was right," she said, "and so far I am satisfied; but my anxiety is great, and though I know that, humanly speaking, Rhoda cannot recover, still I feel that the responsibility of her illness now lies upon me. Father Andrea, as a man, has little to do with a sick-room, except in his spiritual capacity; Lucia is too young to be of assistance to me; my servants are mostly foreigners; and I could not bring myself to leave her to the sole care of a hired nurse. In this state of affairs is it selfish to ask if you can assist me? With you, I should know that I had sympathy and support; and you would be able to say and do many things in regard to the poor girl's family, which I could not. I almost dread meeting the mother, she so hates my religion; and, I hear, is never moderate in her language of condemnation. To you, a Protestant, she could say nothing. I have written to ask Mrs. Percival that you may be spared to me for a few days; but if you have any reason for declining, destroy the note, and do not think for an instant that your refusal can in any way affect my sincere regard, and, I may add with truth — gratitude, for what you have already done for a member of our Holy Church."

Poor Margaret! the net was closing around her, and she was rejoicing in the snare. When she had finished reading the note, the thought crossed her mind that her uncle's absence might turn out to her advantage. She did not quite think he would approve of her going to Henningsley; but she satisfied herself that his disapprobation would be unfounded. At any rate, it was too late now to inquire into his reasons for considering it inexpedient to form an intimacy with a Romanist. Margaret might have learnt a lesson of prudence, and distrust of herself, from the firmness with which this single observation, the only one which Mr. Sutherland had ever made upon the subject, had implanted itself in her memory. At each succeeding step that brought her nearer to the point from which it was intended to warn her, it had recurred to her afresh. But at every remembrance, Margaret had turned aside with the thought, "This is not the moment to

draw back." Now, when the object of her wishes was so nearly attained, that friendship which had never been entirely absent from her thoughts since, twelve months before, she had first seen the Countess Novera, she had scarcely the power, and certainly not the will to pause and reflect upon what might possibly be the result. The way appeared to have been smoothed before her, and so it has been with many. Is it that the providence of God places us in situations of trial, which we have no strength to resist? Or is it rather that religious faith is a subject of such awful, overwhelming importance, that when we tamper with it lightly, and dally with that which we have been warned against by our lawful guides, as error, the offence is allowed to bring its own punishment, and they who have courted the first temptation are permitted to wander within reach of a second? Yet Margaret yielded her imagination to the attractions of Romanism, and sought to cultivate an intercourse with those who professed it, and had little or no suspicion that she was acting wrongly.

Mrs. Percival's permission for the visit to Henningsley was gained without much difficulty. The question of the children was indeed a serious one; but the Countess's note was so flattering, that it seemed desirable to make any sacrifice in order to secure such a friendship; and it was agreed that Mrs. Percival should be the governess herself during Margaret's absence.

"You will take care not to stay longer than you can help, my dear," she said, as Margaret was leaving the room to write her answer of acceptance. "We shall want you back again, sadly. Don't mention any particular time, and then you can come home at a moment's notice. And, Margaret — wait one minute — I must speak to Baker; I should like to know what dresses you will take."

At nineteen Margaret could little endure such an interference with her wardrobe. There was an expression about the mouth which betokened displeasure; but it soon disappeared. "I shall not want many, mamma. The Countess will not, of course, have any company."

"No, no, I forgot; but still I should like you to have enough: and there may be visitors unexpectedly."

Baker was sent for, and Margaret found that her services would not be much required in her own packing. Mrs. Percival preferred inspection to teaching, and Margaret was told, as a matter of favour, that if she would go to the school-room, her mother would undertake to arrange what it would be necessary for her to carry with her.

"Are you really going away, Margaret?" asked Harriet, when her sister appeared, and occupied her usual place at the table. "Symonds said you were."

"We shall not know about our lessons if you do," said Grace.

"I don't like you to go," exclaimed Philip; and he came up to her, and climbing upon the back of her chair, kissed her cheek, whilst roughly disordering her hair.

"I shall not begin Italian, now," continued Harriet, "for another whole week. Oh! Margaret, I wish you would stay at home. Nothing will do well when you are away."

Margaret was pleased at the lamentations over her departure. They made her hope that her efforts to be gentle and impartial had been of service; and she perceived that the order which she had introduced into her own life by acting upon rule, had not been without effect upon the children. Certainly in comparing the present state of the school-room with that of twelve-months previous, the change seemed wonderful. It was not that observances of times and seasons had in themselves produced any magical effect, but they had introduced the principle of regularity; and having been undertaken upon right grounds, had given a tone to Margaret's own mind which had insensibly acted upon her pupils. Children, however inclined to be thoughtless and disorderly, always prefer method in their teachers; and Margaret had gained the hearts of all, as much by a greater attention to system, as by an increase of consideration and patience. The danger now lay in the contrary extreme. Mr. Sutherland's hints upon the inexpediency of giving too minute rules for daily life—putting the mind in a go-cart, however applicable to the subject for which they were at first introduced, did not strike Margaret as having anything to do with education; and finding that a few stringent laws had been beneficial, she fell into the natural error of supposing that many would be more so. In the prospect of a week's absence, she thought it might be advisable to express her wishes very distinctly; and accordingly, a list of commands and warnings was made out for each, which entered even into the play hours, and left but little room for freedom of choice or action. The actual hearing the lessons she knew might be easily left to her mother; but there were many little trifles which Margaret was accustomed to watch particularly when at home, and which she did not like to have neglected whilst she was away. Harriet was told to put away her walking-dress and bonnet in a certain order, that nothing might be mislaid; her lessons were directed to be learnt in rotation, taking the most difficult first, without

any regard to the particular inclination of the moment; she was restricted in her amusements out of school hours, not simply by being forbidden to read books which were beyond her age, but by being obliged to read those which were considered most instructive; besides many other minor injunctions in which Grace and Philip were included. This tutelage had been very bearable whilst Margaret was at hand to suggest, and not to command; and she did not see, neither did the children imagine, that it would be different when converted into a law. The point to be gained in Margaret's mind was the adherence to good habits; but the real point, which is the aim of all wise education, either of men or of children, lies far beyond. Human beings must be governed and directed with a view to their being in time able to govern themselves; and neither implicit obedience to a spiritual guide in man or woman, nor a mechanical routine in a child, can take the place of that voluntary subjection to the law of truth and holiness which is our only happiness. Margaret, however, only thought of keeping the children in good order, whilst she was at Henningsley; and having settled everything she believed necessary, returned to her mother. She was longing now to set off for her walk, dreading that something unforeseen should occur to stop her. A remembrance of her uncle now and then came across her, and it was strangely unwelcome; but Margaret was busy, and in a hurry; and there was no time to enter into an examination of conscience.

"I begged the Countess not to send the carriage for me, mamma," she said, as the luncheon-bell rang, and she was called down stairs. "I knew I should enjoy the walk, and Symonds can have my few things carried to Henningsley in the course of the afternoon; the distance is really nothing."

"As you like my dear. I shall probably take the children out myself. I have some thoughts of driving to Ashington, and Agatha will be glad to see them."

"And make my peace with Colonel Clive, mamma, if you can," said Margaret, laughing.

Mrs. Percival laughed also, and was afraid it would be a task of difficulty.

CHAPTER XLIII.

On the same afternoon Mrs. St. Aubyn's drawing-room was crowded with visitors, and amongst them appeared Agatha, Colonel Clive, and Lucia Fontana. Lucia seemed to be domesticated in the house. She wore a morning-dress, and her long, dark, glossy hair was plaited round her head, so as to display its symmetry of form to great advantage. Her eyes were full of lustre, her mouth was smiling, and her manner animated. She was in all respects, except in the outline of her features, unlike the retiring, melancholy foreigner, whom the world had pitied when it had first beheld her at Henningsley. Mrs. St. Aubyn addressed her frequently, and brought her into notice by a tone of intimacy, at which Agatha bit her lip, in the endeavour to conceal a scornful smile. Colonel Clive lounged upon a sofa, and looked moody; and his tone, even when he made the most indifferent speeches, was indicative of much hidden annoyance. Lucia watched him carefully, whilst she seemed to give attention to the like topics of conversation; for she was observant of every one connected with the Percivals. Agatha moved, with the intention of going some time before the other visitors, but as often Colonel Clive did not perceive it: and at length, as if impatient, she coldly shook hands with Mrs. St. Aubyn, and saying that she believed the Colonel had business in the town, went away.

Her departure was the signal for others; one by one, each made the proper civilities, and in a few minutes the room was nearly empty, Colonel Clive and Lucia only remaining. The Colonel looked round for his wife.

"Where is Agatha?—gone?"

"Gone," replied Mrs. St. Aubyn; "she seldom pays long visits."

"I meant her to go with me to several places,—I thought she understood it," continued the Colonel; "but she always escapes me."

He walked angrily to the window.

"I think I heard Mrs. Clive say, that she expected her mother to call, and that she wished to be in time to see her," said Lucia in a low voice to Mrs. St Aubyn.

The remark was repeated to the Colonel, who exclaimed:

"That makes no difference. Why did she come out if she did not intend to stay? A mother, indeed!" he muttered to himself; "what business have married women with relations?"

"None at all," observed Mrs. St. Aubyn. "When I married,

I gave up all my home connections at once. I thought it quite right; and young people in these days should do the same."

Colonel Clive was not mollified by this speech, though Mrs. St. Aubyn had made it without any intention of adding fuel to the already kindled flame.

"I shall let Agatha know what I think about it," he began in a grave, rather pompous tone, and then, in a louder key, and, regardless of the presence of Lucia, whom he believed, notwithstanding her many months' residence in England, to be incapable of understanding anything he said, he broke forth in a full tide of complaints, of which one, and not the least, was Margaret's change of engagement on the preceding day. "The appearance of the dinner was spoilt," he said—"entirely spoilt. Three gentlemen together, and Captain Tracy walked into the dining-room alone! Such blunders never were known at Ashington before, and they shall not be again. The next time Margaret is asked to my house it shall be when we are entirely by ourselves."

"Margaret is thoughtless in such cases, I must own," said Mrs. St. Aubyn; "she reads a great deal too much, and her mother shuts her up in the school-room till she really is scarcely fitted for society. I tell Mrs. Percival often that it is a very bad place for her; but she says to me that it cannot be helped."

Colonel Clive interrupted the repetition of a long conversation, which he knew was coming, by a continuation of his own grievances. "Mrs. Percival manages as badly as possible. You used to say she understood how to do things, and that she would set Agatha right; but Agatha is perfectly obstinate, and her mother does nothing. My parties are failures; the dinner yesterday was one. Three gentlemen together, and Captain Tracy walking into the room alone—It was too bad!—To change her mind at the last minute!"

Who the "her" meant was not clear from the sentence preceding; but Colonel Clive, like many irritable persons, had a faculty for confounding faults and persons. "If it was not you, it was your grandmother," was his motto, as well as that of the wolf in the fable, whenever his temper was aroused.

Mrs. St. Aubyn allowed him to go on, knowing that it was in vain to interrupt; but though she entirely sympathised with his annoyance, she would have preferred that it should not be exhibited before another person.

Lucia took up a book, though without any intention of reading. For some minutes the conversation continued in the same strain in which it had begun, betraying to Lucia's ear many of the secret

cares of the Ashington household, and inducing her to form, not unwillingly, a very unfavourable opinion of Agatha and her family.

Mrs. St. Aubyn at length grew uncomfortable, and endeavoured to interpose some observations, which might divert her brother's wrath. She did not much care, whilst he spoke only of such trifles as Margaret's absence from the dinner table; and she could with difficulty resist adding a few personal attacks upon Agatha, whom she was beginning cordially to dislike; but when the Colonel proceeded to more minute details as to the defective management of his household, and hinted, in rather plain terms, that if he had known the Percivals as well before marriage as he did then, he never would have connected himself with them, Mrs. St. Aubyn became very anxious to stop him. The quick eyes of the young Italian she saw were raised every now and then from her book, and it was a great mistake in Colonel Clive to imagine that she did not uuderstand him. After eight months' residence in England, and a constant study of the language, Lucia was fully capable both of comprehending and speaking it; and Mrs. St. Aubyn knowing this, sincerely wished her at Henningsley.

Colonel Clive ceased at length, and went away, saying he should go to the news-room in Staunton. Mrs. St. Aubyn was doubtful what next should be done; she was a woman of ordinary judgment, and often kept right merely from her knowledge of the ways of the world, in which she had so long moved; and when Lucia shut her book, as if expecting her to enter into conversation, for want of some other subject she remarked, by way of apology, that her brother had a good many things to vex him; married persons generally had. Lucia agreed; but thought that Colonel Clive had been married too short a time to have had an opportunity of knowing care.

"That is your ignorance of our English ways, my dear. Married people in this country are thrown very much together, and they soon find out whether they suit. I don't mean, of course, to say anything against Mrs. Clive; but naturally she likes society, and my brother is getting on in life; he is beginning to think of quiet."

"There must be a very considerable disparity between them," observed Lucia.

"Yes, more exactly than there ought to have been; but one sees things so differently at different times, and Agatha always appeared extremely fond of him."

"Which means that she is not fond of him now," thought Lucia.

"It certainly was a very fortunate thing for her," continued Mrs. St. Aubyn. "There is a large family of the Percivals, and they cannot all expect to marry so well."

"How many children are there?" inquired Lucia.

"Eight, altogether: three sons and five daughters. The eldest son is in the army."

"I think I have seen him," observed Lucia.

"Very possibly. He is a fine young man; extravagant and thoughtless, as all young men are; but people make a great deal of him, wherever he goes."

And here Mrs. St. Aubyn stopped, believing that she had rather neutralised, by her moderation, the effect of her brother's anger. But Lucia was not to be deceived. She had been prejudiced against the Percivals before: she was more so now; and the thought that Margaret was on that very day to become an inmate of Henningsley was hateful to her. Mrs. St. Aubyn, upon consideration, felt that she had gone rather far in her confidence; but she satisfied herself by adding—"I say these little things to you, my dear, but I should not do so to every one. Of course you will not think of repeating them."

Lucia smiled, and said, "Assuredly not;" and from that moment felt that she had acquired a firmer hold upon Mrs. St. Aubyn's favour. The acquaintance was now even of more consequence to her that it had been the year before. She had imbibed a taste for society during her stay in Devonshire, and, though equally jealous, was less satisfied with the Countess as a solitary companion. Mrs. St. Aubyn's house was the resort of the first and gayest families in the neighbourhood, and there was a hope that it would be open to her at all times. The renewal of the acquaintance had certainly been very flattering. Mrs. St. Aubyn called at Henningsley the very day after her arrival, and evinced great pleasure at the meeting. She pressed for an early visit; and, upon learning the state of the household, and the preparations which were making to receive poor Rhoda, mentioned that if Lucia's assistance and companionship were not necessary for the Countess, or if her spirits were at all oppressed by the sight of such serious illness, it would charm her to see her at any moment she might wish for a change. The invitation was repeated to the Countess, and it was no sooner understood that Margaret would spend a few days at Henningsley than Lucia was sent to Mrs. St. Aubyn. In the dismantled state of the house, the accommodation was not great, for Rhoda occupied the only spare room which had as yet been properly fitted up; and the Countess secretly rejoiced

that so good an excuse was afforded for enjoying Margaret's society alone. Lucia heard that she was to go with mingled feelings of satisfaction and jealousy. Mrs. St. Aubyn's house was very different from Henningsley, and much more suited to her new tastes; but the idea of Margaret's occupying her apartment, her place, her position as the Countess's friend, was intolerable. Beatrice carefully strove to calm the feelings which she perceived had been excited. She spoke of Margaret with indifference personally; but said that it was desirable, under the circumstances, to have an English person with her whom Rhoda knew.

"If only in charity, something of the kind ought to be arranged," she said, "or the poor girl would feel that she was dying amongst strangers."

To this Lucia was compelled to agree; and at last, softened by the Countess's manner, and the promise that she would send a note every day, and that Father Andrea would not fail to visit her, she departed happily. Father Andrea was not so well pleased as the Countess. He saw that it was an unavoidable necessity; but he did not like to give up his charge, even for the short time that this would probably be. The Countess, however, was urgent, for many reasons. Unknowingly, her own inclinations strongly influenced her; and Father Andrea yielded with the better grace, as he knew that Mrs. St. Aubyn was not likely to interfere upon the subject of religion; nor was Lucia in danger of seeing or hearing anything whilst with her, which would at all lead her to imagine that the Protestant faith could in any way be superior to the Romish.

CHAPTER XLIV.

SEVERAL days went by, and Margaret was still an inmate of Henningsley, without any immediate prospect of a change. They were days of intense excitement and interest, mingled with many hours of solemn, awful thought.

In a distant chamber, worn with suffering, and sinking rapidly, lay the wasted form of Rhoda Newbolt, her spirit hovering, as it were, between earth and heaven; sometimes bowed down by the weariness, the anguish of disease; sometimes piercing into the unknown future, and shrinking with fear from the possible torment which might await her; and then, resting with unhesitating confidence upon her membership with the true Church,

the pardon which she believed was sealed for her in heaven, and the trust that whatever might be deficient in herself would be supplied by the offices of the Church. Margaret did not know the whole of this. Father Andrea was watchful over her even more than over Rhoda. The one he considered to be safe, the other was yet in peril. The personal wants of the sick girl were supplied by a careful nurse, and Margaret was only admitted to the chamber when any of her relations visited her, to whom her presence was more satisfactory than that of the Countess; or at those seasons when prayer and spiritual advice had calmed and elevated the sufferer's mind. Rhoda could then speak of comfort and hope; of more than hope — assurance of final salvation; and while she blessed Margaret for her kindness, and prayed that her path through life might be happier than her own, she would often raise her feeble voice in prayer, that in one respect she might be even like herself, — in the knowledge and reception of the true faith. From the chamber of sickness and approaching death, Margaret went to the Countess Novera. There were the same desires, though unexpressed: she could not doubt it. The Countess's thoughtfulness, almost compassion when her religion was alluded to, — the tone in which she spoke of Rhoda's conversion, — the expressed hope that it might be granted to her before her death to see all whom she loved in a similar frame of mind, betokened to Margaret the wishes which Beatrice had never yet named. Margaret said to herself that such anxiety was in accordance with Romish principle; and having no idea of danger, she indulged in the luxury of believing that she had at length gained the Countess's affection. The heart which sorrow had closed against human love seemed expanding again for her. There was indeed no actual certainty. Beatrice had not in words gone beyond the terms of regard and esteem; but her face brightened when Margaret entered; her footstep lingered in the room where Margaret was seated; the merest intimation of a wish was acted upon; and if Margaret in return ventured to imply something of that which was passing in her own breast, Beatrice dwelt upon the subject, and eagerly, yet delicately, sought to gain a still deeper insight into her heart, as if there was centred the one chief object of her interest. The Countess was indeed more influenced by her pleasure in Margaret's society than she had at all imagined probable, when she first invited her to Henningsley. Religion was mingled with her increasing affection; for the prospect of conversion, which seemed doubtful at a distance, was beheld with a sanguine eye,

as Beatrice grew more acquainted with the secrets of Margaret's mind. And her perception was aided by Father Andrea. He could watch the fulfilment of his prophecy as Margaret bowed beneath the spell of the Countess's commanding disposition, when exhibited to others, and her winning gentleness to herself. He saw the power which beauty in poetry, or art, or nature, exercised over her, and he taught the Countess to profit by his long experience, and to display the attractive character of her religion, so as insensibly to associate it with all that was most noble and refined in feeling or action. And for himself there was another task. He could speak of the village and the poor; he could lament the ignorance of the children, the obtuseness and hard-heartedness of the parents, and remark, as if making a careless observation, that he had found it the same in other places. He could point to the dissensions within the Church, and when reading the public papers, comment upon the interference of the State in ecclesiastical affairs, and suggest that when such a condition of things was allowed to exist, Erastianism must of necessity be the foundation on which the English Church was really built, whatever might be its theory of independence. Margaret had never studied Church history, either ancient or modern, and could not therefore bring facts to answer in the Romish Church. She knew nothing of the condition of the peasantry in Italy, in the immediate vicinity of the Roman see; she did not believe the assertions which were made regarding the superstition and degradation of the greater part of the population of Ireland; she had never read the annals of the early ages of Christianity, and could not therefore repel the charge of Erastianism by pointing to the time when the power of the emperors was paramount over the Church; or cast it back upon the very origin of the Papal system, by showing, that after Gregory the Great, in opposition to the Patriarch of Constantinople, had denounced as "the forerunner of Antichrist" any bishop who should arrogate to himself the title of "Universal," a successor, Boniface the Third, consented to receive the same dignity from Phocas, usurper though he was, and stained with the guilt of murder. Of these facts, and many others which are to be met with in the annals of history, and are recorded by Romanists themselves, Margaret was ignorant. Church history had formed but a very small part of her education. Because the Papal power was strongly asserted, and had been exercised for many centuries, — though never without finding some one to raise a voice against it, — therefore she imagined it must stand upon a firm foundation, and she was in-

clined to believe that England had committed an act of schism, by cutting herself off voluntarily from Rome, in compliance with the will of a wicked monarch; and that the only justification of such an act was to be found in that accusation of erroneous doctrine, which after an intercourse with the Countess and her confessor appeared, very possibly, unfounded. Father Andrea saw that he was progressing, and to an extent which rather surprised him. Though he had early discovered Margaret's unsettled indefinite Church principles, he had yet prepared himself for a more powerful defence upon controverted points than she was able to make; for having been himself early fortified against the assaults of what his Church deems heresy, and instructed in the points upon which Rome, whether fairly or unfairly, is accustomed to rest her claims, he did not expect to find, what is actually the case in many instances, though it was only partially so in Margaret's, that the children of the English Church have been allowed to grow up in the midst of dissent, both Romish and Sectarian, without being provided with any sound argument for their support, and without fully knowing that the Church to which they belong is descended by direct and well proved succession from the first Apostles of Christianity. The few, but pointed observations of Father Andrea, were, however, less dangerous to Margaret's safety than the more enticing intercourse with the Countess. She was a little on her guard against the one, and her spirit was sometimes roused to reason away a charge against the Church, or to doubt the assertions which were made as to the overweening power of the State; but with Beatrice she could do nothing except listen and love. After an attendance upon poor Rhoda she would sometimes wander into the garden for refreshment, and there being almost immediately joined by the Countess, who seemed to know her movements by instinct, they would spend hours under the shade of the trees, or pacing the terrace slowly, or resting upon the stone balustrade overlooking the lovely landscape, whilst time fled by unheeded, as the Countess related in simple but beautiful language the history of her early days, or drew from Margaret the secret trials of her own, or touching upon some grave subject, shed the charm of romance over the disputed doctrines of her Church, and painted the blessedness of the invisible beings whom she addressed, the sense of security in their protection, the hallowed purity and superhuman beauty of the Virgin Mother of our Lord, or the unutterable comfort afforded in hours of desolation by the privilege of interceding for the dead.

"You have never lost a friend, you say," observed Beatrice, at the close of one of these conversations: "then you cannot enter into the subject heartily. When such an affliction shall befall you, you will think upon my words."

"I shall scarcely need that to remind me of them," said Margaret. "Rhoda Newbolt's case has made me consider the point."

"Poor Rhoda! yes, she dwells with deep satisfaction upon Father Andrea's promise."

The thought crossed Margaret's mind—"Father Andrea may die likewise;" but she merely said, that the idea was beautiful, though she could not remember any passage in the Bible which sanctioned the belief that the condition of any individual could be altered after death.

"The belief suits you," said the Countess, with a sweet smile; "you will not quarrel with me now, for saying that the turn of your mind is more towards Catholicism than Protestantism. Witness your admiration of all which I admire, and yet I am a rigid Catholic."

"Not rigid," replied Margaret, "or you could not bear with me."

"Yes, rigid indeed, if you knew me well. It is an inheritance derived from many generations. I could tell you a tale:—you remember the picture which you yesterday said had enabled you to recognise me at Rouen?"

"The Viscountess de Lisle," replied Margaret, "and—"

"The gentle Rachel, as she has been always termed; I see you know the story. Can you doubt now that we are rigid?"

"There might have been more of principle than of cruelty in the Viscountess," said Margaret.

An expression of pleasure, and something of enthusiasm lit up the Countess's face.

"We will go and look at my ancestress," she said, quickening her step. "I can talk to you better, make you more able to understand my feeling towards her, when in her presence."

They entered the dining-room, and the Countess, standing opposite to the picture, regarded it intently for some little time in silence. Margaret's eye wandered from the childish beauty of the painting to the maturer, but more perfect loveliness of the graceful Countess, and could with difficulty trace the resemblance she had imagined so striking. Sorrow and care had left their indelible mark upon the pale cheek, which had so early in life been wet with the tears of widowhood; and the bright pink spot,

forming a brilliant contrast to its clear white, was a sign of a constitution that would have sunk under but a small portion of the trials which had in after years shaken the reason, yet left undiminished the strength of the youthful Viscountess.

"I have looked at her often," exclaimed Beatrice, at length, without removing her eyes from the picture, "and tried to form a proper estimate of her character. As a child, she excited my awe and wonder, long before I understood that I might admire her. There seemed such a strange inconsistency between her infantine, joyous features, and the long life of suffering."

"But surely," replied Margaret, "though you may pity and excuse, you can scarcely think she was justified."

"Nay, you have heard the Protestant version, I perceive," said the Countess, interrupting her. "Eleanor de Lisle was not a person to require justification."

"Yet you say she was rigid," observed Margaret.

"Rigid as I would be rigid myself; firm in the cause of truth, even as I trust I might be, if I were called upon to sacrifice myself for it."

"And was there no excuse for her daughter?" asked Margaret.

"Rachel was a gentle, timid creature," replied the Countess, "weak in intellect and will. She was not worthy to be the child of such a mother; one who could at the same time rule for the Church and die for it."

"But the facts of the story are true?" said Margaret.

"True, perhaps, in their main outline. You have heard, doubtless, of the north turret. Rachel was shut up there; but it was not then, as it is now, weather-stained and damp. It was provided with every comfort which the habits of the age required, and during her three days' imprisonment, Rachel had food and attendance for the body, and books for the mind, which were to convert her from her errors, together with the visits of her confessor; whilst her mother passed the days and nights in prayer, and fasting and watching, in the hope that the salvation of her daughter might be accorded to her intercessions."

Margaret's glance was turned to the painting, and the features which before seemed imbued with the taint of severity, assumed a softer aspect.

"But the illness," she said, "was assuredly much neglected."

"The Protestant version again!" repeated the Countess, lightly; and then she added, with greater earnestness — "It is hard upon us, that even the histories of our own families cannot go forth to the

world unaltered. Rachel was seriously ill only for a few weeks: drooping she had been much longer; but it was not easy then, as it is now, to procure safe medical advice; and her mother, who had long been skilled in such practice, administered to her wants herself."

"But not to her mind," said Margaret; "yet might she not have known that the fault lay there rather than in the body."

"How could she suppose such a case?" returned the Countess, with sudden energy. "How could the wife of a De Lisle, descended herself from the same stock, suppose that her daughter could be guilty of such weakness and deception as to profess a religion which she did not believe; or own herself converted, merely because she was weary of three days' solitude? No, upon that point I can fully exculpate her."

"The story, as I heard it," replied Margaret, "said that the Viscountess did not know the state of her daughter's mind, but that she was wilfully blind to her illness."

Beatrice turned quickly, and whilst a proud blush overspread her cheek, she said, in a tone of blended seriousness and affection —"Promise me that you will try and not be prejudiced by these false tales. I have heard that I am the inheritor, not merely of the features of Eleanor de Lisle, but of her character also, and I could little bear that you should condemn me."

"Condemn you!" repeated Margaret. "No, who could do that?"

"You could," replied the Countess, "and must, if you have truly imbibed the Protestant creed. But think," she continued, and her manner assumed an unconscious elevation—"think of one whose faith had been the patrimony of her family for centuries; who could reckon prelates and cardinals amongst her race; one who could carry back her lineage even beyond the date of the Norman conqueror, and who had never known one example of faltering allegiance to our holy Church; what must have been her feelings at the first prospect of a blot upon the family honour, at the discovery of a traitor to the cause of truth amongst her own children?" The Countess paused, and added: "That was the case of Eleanor de Lisle. My spiritual inheritance would have been like hers, but for the fall of the unhappy Rachel."

"Then there have never been converts to Protestantism from amongst you?" said Margaret.

"Never, in the direct line. Collateral branches have wandered off, as they mixed with other families; but it is our boast that, with that one sad exception, neither the sons nor daughters of the

Viscounts de Lisle have ever proved apostate. I am the last;"—the Countess clasped her hands fervently;—"God grant that the faith I have received may be carried with me untainted to my grave!"

Margaret could not reply. She was searching in her own heart for an attachment as strong to the Church of her fathers.

"You cannot feel with me?" said the Countess, doubtfully.

"Yes," replied Margaret, "I can feel; that is, if I were in your place, I should do so; but—"

"Ah! you are a Protestant; if you were not"—Beatrice hesitated, and concluded, as if the words had escaped against her will,—"there would be but few blessings greater than to know that in all things we could think alike."

She left the room, but Margaret remained behind. A tumult of conflicting emotions had been raised by the conversation. The Countess's affection was showing itself each day more evidently, and Margaret was happy. But separation was becoming less bearable in consequence. Alike in all things! Beatrice could not desire it more ardently than she did. Yet on which side lay the right? Margaret's eye was again attracted to the picture, and when she looked at it, the dream which had associated it with herself came to her remembrance. As she had felt before in imagination, so she felt now in reality. The strength to govern seemed the undoubted patrimony of Rome. The bright, deep searching eye of the Viscountess de Lisle appeared to rest upon her reproachfully, and when Margaret sought in her own heart for the strength which was to resist the appeal, she could find none. The spirit of criticism and discontent had undermined, unknown to herself, the spirit of loyalty and reverence.

Margaret's slumbers on the following night were broken by the voice of the Countess's Italian maid. Lauretta was standing by her bed-side, pale and frightened, and holding a night-lamp in her hand.

"The Countess," she said, "was wishing to see Miss Percival immediately."

Margaret started up, and hastily inquired the hour. Lauretta did not know. She had been summoned by her mistress's bell, for the English girl was dying. Margaret's heart stopped beating. Even when in the course of a long life, we have met death often face to face, the certainty of its near approach will cause a sudden revulsion of dread. How much more when we view it for the first time in the fulness of our health and youth!

"I will come," she said, "instantly."

And Lauretta, lighting the candle on the table, went away. Margaret knelt for one moment in prayer, that aid might be given to the sufferer, and those who should minister to her last need; and then, as speedily as possible arranging her dress, proceeded to the Countess's room. Beatrice was waiting for her. She was composed, even hopeful in manner, and in a tone more subdued, indeed, than usual, but quite free from excitement, said:

"I knew you would desire to be sent for. All must soon be over, and Father Andrea wishes that you should take your last leave."

"But I would be with her," said Margaret, "even to the end."

"That may not be; the final offices of the Church must be performed, and she must not afterwards be disturbed by you."

A slight stress was laid upon the concluding word, and Margaret bitterly felt the separation which it implied.

"I will go with you to the door," continued the Countess, as Margaret still delayed; "we must not lose time."

She led the way into the dark gallery, and Margaret mechanically followed. They passed many half-opened, empty rooms, dimly lighted, for an instant, by the Countess's lamp, and Margaret shuddered. The desolateness of the house was tenfold increased at that solemn hour, and shadowy forms seemed hovering and gliding near, awaiting the release of the spirit which was about to escape from its earthly tabernacle.

"Father Andrea is there; but he will leave you alone," whispered the Countess, when she reached the top of the winding staircase that led to Rhoda's apartment.

Margaret drew back, afraid of the scene which she was about to encounter. Beatrice turned the handle of the door, and motioned her to enter. The confessor was standing near the bed, holding a crucifix; but as he caught Margaret's footstep he moved aside for her to approach. One moment he remained to watch the effect of that pallid, death-stricken countenance, upon her, whose spiritual interests were becoming the subject of his daily prayer, and then grasping Margaret's hand, he murmured a petition that she might be blest, and left her. The single attendant drew back into an inner room, and Margaret remained alone. Alone! with death! —Who does not shrink from the thought? and yet to that point must we all come, not merely in sight, but in personal experience. "*Il faut mourir seul*" is the sentence inscribed over us at our birth, and the longest life is but the longest preparation for our closing, solitary hour. Margaret bent over the dying girl, awe-struck and wondering. Every lineament was altered, and the

feeble, gasping breath seemed each moment as though it would be the last.

"Rhoda," she said, and started at the sound of her own voice.

The glazed eye was steadfastly fixed upon her, and a smile rested upon the colourless lips.

"I am come to bid you farewell. God and our Saviour in mercy grant you comfort and acceptance! I must not be with you, but I will pray." Tears fell fast down Margaret's cheek, and her voice grew faint. "We shall meet again, dear Rhoda," she added; "we cannot now be parting for ever."

Rhoda raised her thin transparent fingers, and with a strength which seemed almost supernatural, repeated—"For ever! — no, you will be safe at last."

She feebly drew Margaret's hand towards her, and retained it, as if unwilling that she should go. There was a slight movement outside the chamber, and Margaret feared lest she had already delayed too long. She pressed her lips upon the pale forehead, around which the dews of death were already gathering; once more the eyes of both met in sympathy and true affection, and Margaret, casting one lingering look upon the bed of death, left the apartment as Father Andrea re-entered it.

Half an hour went by; Margaret was kneeling in her chamber. She was praying for Rhoda, for the Countess, for her parents, her uncle, the children, — all whom she had ever loved. A sense of the unspeakable value of life, the unutterable awfulness of death, gave a hitherto unknown fervency to her petitions. The sound of a gliding tread was heard in the gallery, a faint knock at the door, and almost before Margaret could answer, the Countess Novera opened it. They looked at each other in silence. The Countess's lip quivered, and she leant against a chair to support herself. Margaret could not put into words the question which was on her lips. She threw her arms around the Countess to give the aid which it seemed was required; and as the genuine movement of affection touched the inmost chords of Beatrice's heart, she hid her face upon Margaret's neck, and bursting into tears, exclaimed:—

"Oh, Margaret! if you had been taken, how should I ever have known comfort again?"

CHAPTER XLV.

THE few days which intervened until after the funeral of Rhoda Newbolt, were spent by Margaret in the peaceful unrestrained enjoyment of the Countess's society. The event that had occurred was one to throw a more serious tone over their intercourse, but not to overwhelm them with depression. It involved no severing of earthly ties, no regret for past happiness, nor fear of future loneliness. She, from whom they had parted, had been in life isolated from the ordinary affections of a family; she had grown up amid strife and bitterness of words, and there were none really to lament her loss, except the sister, who could not wish her to return to encounter again the storms from which she had thus early escaped. In the remembrance of Beatrice, Rhoda Newbolt would ever be associated with an act of kindness, hallowed by religion; in that of Margaret, with the circumstances which had first placed her in connection with the Countess, and subsequently been the means of cementing their daily increasing regard. But all was now to be changed. Margaret received a summons to her home; and the Countess saw that Lucia must not be kept from hers. Father Andrea agreed that there could be no excuse for detaining Margaret at Henningsley; and though himself enjoying her visit, he did not, on her account, lament the necessity of its conclusion. Between Henningsley and the Grove there existed but a short distance in space, and a still shorter one in feeling. Margaret, he was assured, must be his convert; her heart was with Beatrice; her tastes were with Romanism. It required only a little longer the charm of the Countess's society, interchange of opinions, and recommendation of books, joined to a few decided arguments, to win his point. His object could, he thought, be almost as easily attained where there was a trifling separation, as by means of a residence under the same roof; for the pleasure of being together would counterbalance the pain of parting, and absence might serve to keep up the spirit of an affection, which, if its course were too smooth, would, perhaps, droop for want of a community of daily interests, as well as a community of tastes. Beatrice and Margaret, however, could not reason like Father Andrea. They counted days and hours, whilst forming plans of meeting, and schemes for similar studies; and hoped, even to the last, that something might intervene to give them the reprieve of another day. To Margaret this new affection came with all th

enthusiasm and excitement of feelings which, from meeting with a return, were now, for the first time, fully called into action. The Countess had known a stronger, a higher, a more impassioned love; but though it still lived in her heart, and was cherished as sacred, and never to be forgotten, there had sprung up, beside it, a deep devotional spirit, which, by adding to her appreciation of Margaret's character an ardent desire for her conversion, seemed destined to supply, as far as could be, the place of the great happiness which had been taken from her.

"You will grant my request?" said the Countess fondly, whilst they lingered together in the garden, watching the traces of the gorgeous sunset, which were quickly disappearing from the western sky: "I must be Beatrice Novera to you from henceforth."

Margaret only smiled.

"Nay, I must not find you obstinate," continued the Countess, in a playful tone, "or you will arouse the proud will which I have warned you is my inheritance."

"I should not love you less," replied Margaret, "because you were the Countess Novera. That was the name by which I first knew you."

"But it is not the name which I love," answered the Countess; and after a moment's silence, she added mournfully,—"there are so few, so very few living now, who have a title to call me Beatrice."

Margaret turned to her with an expression of intense affection, and the Countess, resting her hand upon her shoulder, said, in the gentlest tone of her melodious voice,—"You are my Margaret,—why may I not be Beatrice to you?"

Margaret sighed, and a vision of her home came before her. It seemed little congenial to the moment. "I will call you Beatrice here," she said, "when we are together, alone; but, to the world, you must still be the Countess Novera. We could neither of us bear the treasure of our love to be rudely scanned, as it must and would be if I agreed fully to your wishes."

The Countess could not own herself contented. "A compromise," she said, rather reproachfully; "your English ways and English curiosity are beyond my comprehension—I have so long been accustomed to live unfettered."

The allusion to her foreign habits brought a change over Margaret's countenance, which Beatrice was not slow to perceive.

"You hate Italy, as I love it," she continued; "there we shall never be agreed."

"I hate it but on your account," replied Margaret, "as it will one day take you from me."

"We will not think of the possibility," said the Countess, whilst her face brightened with an expression which Margaret did not comprehend; "I am not going now,—I may not go at all; and if I do, there may be changes which may still unite us. Let us speak of other things: you have promised me that you will read my books."

"Daily," replied Margaret; "they will be my chief enjoyment when I am absent from you."

"And you will read them with a free unbiassed mind, casting away, for my sake, the prejudices which might induce you to judge unfavourably of them?"

"As much as possible," answered Margaret; "but you must remember that you may require a difficult task. If they are like Pascal and Massillon, however, I shall have no prejudices to cast away."

"There are some differences," replied the Countess: "these put forth more openly the distinctive doctrines of the Church; but I think you will be much struck with their fervent piety."

Margaret again promised to study all that Beatrice might desire; though, at the same time, as much for the sake of her own conscience, as to warn the Countess against false expectations, she uttered a protest against the possibility of her being led to approve error because she might admire the form in which it was displayed. Beatrice made no profession of confident hope, for Father Andrea had tutored her into caution. Whatever was said arose naturally from circumstances; and even the wish that Margaret should read particular books seemed the necessary consequence of the harmony of their tastes.

The following day they parted. Margaret's grief was unrestrained, as the Countess spoke despondingly of the dreariness which all things would assume when she was absent; whilst Father Andrea expressed his earnest wishes that they might soon be permitted to renew the pleasure her visit had afforded.

"Our own at last, my daughter," said the confessor, when, after placing Margaret in the carriage, he went back to the Countess to watch it as it descended the hill. Beatrice did not respond to his hopes as he had expected. There were moments when the first regret which had chilled her proselytising zeal, the fear that Margaret must suffer, returned in full force.

"And the anguish before that moment shall arrive!" she said.

"Do not dread it," replied Father Andrea; "it will be a puri-

fying fire; and the common path of life is so unexciting to minds like Miss Percival's, that the prospect of suffering, even of martyrdom, would be a stimulus rather than a check to conversion."

Beatrice thought that it might be so; but at the instant of separation, she felt too affectionately for Margaret, to bear to be the instrument of her trials. "Entreat for me, father," she said, "that I may be ardent and unwearied like yourself in the cause of our holy Church;" and turning away from him, she retired to her own chamber, to strengthen herself by prayer and meditation against the tenderness which she feared was a sinful weakness.

What a change seemed to have passed over the Grove when Margaret returned to it! It was in a degree like a new home, or rather like the half-remembered scenes which we remember after a long absence; strange at first, and without apparently a claim upon our attachment, but gradually growing into distinctness, and at length becoming familiar to our memory, and casting in their turn a shadowy mist over the places and events which have intervened between them and the present hour. Much had been done and said during Margaret's visit, of which she had received little information from notes, though they had been frequent; and she was obliged to give attention, at least in appearance, to many domestic details, whilst in heaviness of heart her thoughts were reverting to Henningsley. It was better, however, to listen than to talk, especially when the talking involved the mention of the Countess's name before such an unsympathising hearer as her mother. Mrs. Percival asked whether there had been any company,—whether there were many morning visitors,—what sort of establishment was kept,—whether the style of living were foreign or English,—and many similar queries, some of which Margaret had a real difficulty in answering; an ignorance extremely perplexing to Mrs. Percival, who always made herself acquainted with such subjects.

"Really, my dear," she said, "it is not worth while to stay from home if you don't make yourself more amusing when you come back. Why, I never go to a common dinner-party without finding out everything there is worth knowing."

Margaret excused herself by saying that it had not been like an ordinary visit; every one had been occupied with Rhoda.

"Very probably, my dear; but, poor thing, she was not your relation. Most distressing it must have been, certainly; still, you went prepared for it, and you could not have been with her always."

Margaret saw that she must recall her scattered thoughts, and

she repeated a few everyday particulars which she thought might be interesting, having a dread lest Mrs. Percival should revert to the poor girl's dying moments, and require her to detail them.

"We have done pretty well in your absence in the school-room," said Mrs. Percival, when Margaret at last succeeded in diverting the conversation from Henningsley. "The children are much improved, I must say; but there are a few of your ways which I have altered. That making them repeat dates so often seems unnecessary, and I think Philip learns too much Latin; and Harriet strikes me as being rather too young to begin Italian. But I am not going to interfere; you really have done wonders for them."

Margaret's heart sank; these little things seemed now so little. Scarcely an hour before, she had been conversing with the Countess Novera, lingering in her room to examine her books, and, as they turned over different volumes, touching upon subjects in which the destinies of the whole human race were concerned. Who could suddenly, without a jar, turn from such contemplations to estimate the importance of a chronological lesson, or to decide upon the quantity of Latin which should be learnt by a boy of seven years old?

A person like Margaret, possessed by an absorbing affection, and as yet only partially alive to the greatness of minor duties, certainly could not. She left her mother as quickly as possible, and shutting herself up in her own room, gave way to melancholy regrets. The next morning brought a more healthy tone of mind. Tidings from Mr. Sutherland, giving but an indifferent account of his health, and saying that he found it a great relief to have less duty and a smaller parish, again awakened Margaret's anxiety, and drawing her out of herself, made her think more of her home and its occupations.

She could not connect any thoughts of her uncle with Henningsley; she did not even like to put them in juxta-position. Something in her heart,—or was it her conscience?—suggested that the two were not in harmony; and the more she dwelt upon the probability of Mr. Sutherland's being seriously unwell, the more her affection for him became paramount, and the less satisfied she was with herself for being inclined to neglect the duties upon which he always strongly insisted. Before going into the school-room she wrote him a short letter, begging him to let her know immediately what was really the matter; and in the postscript there was added: "Since you went away I have seen more of the Countess Novera; for I have been assisting her in attending

upon the poor girl, whom you may perhaps remember to have heard me mention, Rhoda Newbolt. Indeed I have been at Henningsley for the last fortnight. I was the only person who took much interest in her besides the Countess." If this had ever reached Mr. Sutherland, it would not have given him much insight into Margaret's state; but it did not reach him. Margaret wrote it very hurriedly, on a slip of paper, which was added to the original note. She believed that both were put into an envelope together; but in her haste a blank piece was taken up instead, and the postscript fell to the ground, and was swept away by the servants.

Margaret's conscience, however, was satisfied, and she entered upon the business of the day more heartily in consequence. "Harriet, dear, you are dull this morning," she remarked, as a comment upon a particularly stupid answer to a question in history. Harriet coloured, and looked more dull than before.

"You must really try and give your full attention," proceeded Margaret. "It vexes me to find you gone back since I have been away."

Harriet went on with her reading; but it was very clear that her thoughts were anywhere rather than with her ancient history, and Margaret again reproved her several times. More blushes and confusion followed, and at length tears, and Margaret, closing the book, inquired, "What was the matter? She had not meant to speak angrily; she only wished for common attention."

Some seconds elapsed before any reply could be obtained, and then Harriet said something indistinctly, the purport of which seemed to be, as is usual in such cases, that nothing was the cause of the distress; and drying her tears, she proceeded in her lesson with greater care. Margaret was a little surprised, for Harriet was not accustomed to give way to feeling. Her chief characteristics were indolence, reserve, and a tendency to a morbid conscientiousness, if such an expression may be allowed. This disposition, though in some respects unlike Margaret's, still exhibited enough similarity to enable her in general to deal with it wisely. She took no more notice of what had passed, either then or in the course of the day; though, after a little observation, she was convinced that something was weighing upon her sister's mind. The idea was rather a benefit to herself in one way; for it served occasionally to call back her thoughts, when they had again travelled to Henningsley and the Countess. And yet, even here, Margaret found means to extract additional food for those dangerous speculations in which she now frequently indulged.

At Harriet's age, confession would already be required in the Romish Church, and the child's mind would no longer be a sealed book; at least to one person. Time was, when if such a fact had brought a question of right to Margaret, she would have longed to talk it over with her uncle, and gain his opinions: now, she reverted to Father Andrea. Much as she stood in awe of him, she was still more interested in his sentiments than in Mr. Sutherland's. It was late in the evening, and the children were gone to bed, when Margaret passed her sister's bed-room, on her return to the drawing-room. A light shone under the closed door, and Margaret remarked it as unusual. Harriet had been up stairs quite long enough to be in bed, and her candle ought to be extinguished. Margaret thought it an instance of the return of dawdling habits, and went in, intending to give an admonition. But there was only a rushlight in the apartment; the curtain was drawn at the side of the bed, and a slight noise was heard, as of some one sobbing.

"Harriet, my love," said Margaret, rather frightened, "what is the matter?"

Harriet turned away, and finding herself without means of escape, took refuge in silence.

"Do tell me," continued Margaret; "you have made me uncomfortable all day by your manner."

"You will be so angry," said Harriet, speaking with difficulty; "but I never meant to do anything so naughty."

"What was it, my dear? Don't be afraid to tell; it is much better that I should know."

"It was about the rules," sobbed Harriet; "those which you wrote down before you went away."

"Well, my dear, did you forget them?" asked Margaret, knowing that Harriet's remorse was not always a true criterion of the gravity of her offence.

"I promised to remember them, Margaret, and you said you were sure I should; but I forgot when I was in a hurry, and sometimes I began to read story-books. Grace used to tell me of it; she recollects much better than I do."

"And was that all?" inquired Margaret.

Poor Harriet's distress broke forth again. "No, Margaret, it was worse than that, a great deal. When you came home you asked whether we had been good, and attended to the rules, and I said yes. But I did not mean to tell a story, indeed I did not."

"And what made you say so, my love?" asked Margaret, in a grave tone.

"I don't know, it came out without my thinking about it."

"But you must have known it was not true, and you might have corrected yourself?"

"I was so frightened," said Harriet, "I could not at first; and I knew it would seem as if I had really meant it, if I were to go up and tell you afterwards. And I did try to recollect sometimes; but in playtime I forgot."

The thought arose in Margaret's mind whether she had been wise in making rules for playtime; but that was not an opportunity for determining. "It was wrong in you, certainly, my dear Harriet," she said; "but I am sure you did not really intend to deceive. What vexes me most is a thing which I have spoken to you about very often."

"Do you mean courage?" said Harriet.

"Yes, what we call moral courage; not being afraid to say out everything at once. You are very particular in speaking the truth, and you would be a great deal happier if you could only be bold with it. You are forced to be so, sooner or later, because it makes you unhappy to keep anything back."

"I shall never be able to do right things, like you, Margaret," said Harriet. "I do such a number of naughty ones."

"But so we all do, my love. It is very hard work, indeed, to be good."

"I forget," continued Harriet; "and very often you don't know it."

A fresh fit of remorse was coming; and Margaret, much as she valued the little girl's tenderness of conscience, saw that it would be injudicious to encourage it just then. "We will not think too much about the past, my dear," she said. "Do you remember that verse in the Psalms which says, that if God were extreme to mark what was done amiss, we should not be able to bear it? But there is mercy with Him, and we must trust to it, and try to do our best, and then He will love us for our Saviour's sake. Now I will fetch a shawl for you, and you shall get up and say a prayer by yourself, to ask Him to forgive you, and give you courage, and then to-morrow we will begin a new day."

She was going away, but Harriet caught her dress. "Margaret, I wish to say something more, if you don't mind."

Margaret put down her candle to listen, though aware that she was wanted in the drawing-room. In such a case any symptom of impatience would have been fatal to confidence.

"Do you recollect one day you told me about a little girl who used to write down her faults every night? I think I should

remember mine a great deal better if I were to write them down."

Margaret considered for an instant. "Perhaps it would be a good plan. You shall try it, if you like."

"And will you give me a book to write in?"

"Yes, to-morrow, if you will remind me of it; and it had better be kept in my room, because there no one will see it."

"Shan't you?" said Harriet, a little anxiously.

"Not unless you wish it, my love."

"But I would rather, Margaret, a great deal."

Margaret was surprised and pleased. This effort of confidence, where so much reserve had previously existed, was wholly unlooked for. "I will see it, if you desire it," she said; "but whenever you begin to dislike my doing it, I will leave off."

Harriet's mind seemed relieved, and Margaret went down stairs more satisfied with her plan of education than she had ever been before—always excepting the rules for playtime.

CHAPTER XLVI.

FROM this period, for the space of many weeks, Margaret's life continued, to all appearance, in the same tranquil routine as before her visit to Henningsley. Perhaps the very consciousness of the change that had passed, and was passing over her mind, made her more careful to conceal every indication of it beneath the steady fulfilment of her home occupations.

The frequent intercourse with Henningsley was the only exception to the rule, and even this was becoming to her parents a matter of course. One visit from the Countess, in which she had expressed enthusiastically her admiration of, though not her love for, Margaret, had fully succeeded in gaining Mrs. Percival's hearty approbation of the intimacy, and there were now no checks to it beyond those interposed by distance or pressing duties. The latter were indeed occasionally neglected, for Margaret's whole heart was now yielded to the Countess, and the perfect sincerity of conscience which had once guided her in her daily life was at times warped by a blinding affection. She could, if necessary, make an excuse for visiting Henningsley, or find reason for giving the children a holiday, in order that she might spend the day there; whereas before, she would have thought that because

inclination prompted her so strongly in one direction, it might at least be doubtful whether she should not be safer in deciding for the contrary. But if Margaret had gone no farther, her peace of mind would have been in comparatively little danger. She was too conscientious to remain long unaware of any deviation from the right path; but it was conscience itself, the guiding principle of her conduct, which was by degrees becoming disordered. Margaret received no answer from Mr. Sutherland to confirm her doubts as to his approbation of her visit. To her surprise, Henningsley was not mentioned in the next letter, and after gathering from its contents that her uncle was not at all better, Margaret comforted herself under the pressure of anxiety by the reflection, that at least she might find relief with the Countess. Perhaps, after all, her uncle thought the acquaintance of little consequence. Such was the first idea whenever any doubt arose as to her line of duty in this particular case; but in a short time even this was not required. Margaret studied the Countess's books, made many parts of the devotions her own, read the lives of the most eminent Romish saints, admired their austerities, and longed to be able to live like them a life apart from the world. The romance, which had once drawn beautiful visions of refined luxury, was now directed to the severities of penance and the simplicity of a convent cell. Could there be any harm in such imaginations? Was it not true that the current of the world's opinion would have led her to idolise wealth and fashion, and was there not something ennobling in the taste which could thus turn from such temptations, and find pleasure in the contemplation, and even in the practice of self-denial? Practice,—for Mr. Sutherland's simple rules did not suit with Margaret's more advanced opinions. She was aiming at what she fancied to be a more exalted course of life. Discipline was no longer a means, it was an end; and saintliness of character was measured not merely by the purity of the inward life, but by fastings and privations, and penances, prescribed by the Romish but not by the English Church. Still, where was the harm? Margaret did not separate the outward from the inward act: she would have turned with horror from the misguided fanaticism which could substitute formal observances for purity of heart. All that she desired was holiness; and where then was the error? The answer may perhaps be found by considering well that prayer of our blessed Lord, offered for His disciples, when they were about to be left "as sheep without a shepherd." "I pray not that Thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that Thou shouldest

keep them from the evil." Not out of the world, but dwelling in it, in obedience to its common forms, in a cheerful compliance with its innocent usages, in home duties and gentle courtesies. And if to desire a more exalted sphere of action is to go beyond the spirit of the wishes which were breathed by infinite wisdom and perfect love, is it not possible that there may also be an ignorance of our real good in indulging an inclination for the severities of a foreign communion, instead of striving to perfect ourselves under our own? We are placed in the world as within a mould; our outward actions are to take its form, so far as that form is innocent, whilst the heart is to be dedicated to God. The Church of our country is a mould likewise; the wisdom of past ages, guided we may believe by the Spirit of God, fixed its limits, and the providence of God ordained that we should be born into it. A dependence upon our own judgment, or upon that of some self-chosen guide, leads us to wish to cast off this mould and adapt ourselves to a different one. We are told that this is not wilfulness, but conscience. Are we sure that it is so? At least it is worth while to consider; for it may be that the indication of God's will concerning us is to be found in the one, the indication of our own in the other. With Margaret a fundamental mistake lay in supposing that what might be advisable for some persons was advisable for all; that austerities and rules of life which might possibly be innocently adopted by the clergy, or by Christians of long experience and sober judgment, who were not likely to be led by them into any toleration of Romish errors, must of necessity be equally innocent for a young girl of an enthusiastic temperament, whose chief duty it was to train herself in submission to the authority set over her by God. If Grace or Philip had proposed to set themselves stricter lessons, and to deprive themselves of their play-hours in order to give more time to study, Margaret would have instantly seen that such wilfulness, even from a good motive, would be likely to have an injurious effect in the end. She would have told them that obedience was their duty, and the formation of rules hers. Or if, where free liberty was allowed them, they had always consulted the tastes and opinions of a stranger, she would equally have been alive to the danger of their choosing another guide instead of herself. There were parallel dangers in her own tone of mind, but her eyes were not open to perceive them.

That bright genial summer, with its deliciously warm days and calm evenings, some spent entirely at Henningsley, and others made happy by the recollection of long conversations and pleasant

walks, and the prospect of speedily enjoying more, was one of complete enchantment to Margaret. Her life was no longer insipid, family anxieties had little power to harass her. At Henningsley, romance, affection, and sympathy always awaited her. And Margaret felt herself ennobled by being with the Countess; her principles were so unworldly, her thoughts so exalted; whilst in taste there was scarcely a shadow of difference between them. Music, poetry, painting, the literature of the day, or the deeper studies of theological writers, formed their usual occupation and topics of interest, and in all Margaret found something to charm her. She could listen with the most unwearied pleasure whilst the Countess, as long as her strength allowed, poured forth her rich, full, devotional tones, in the glorious compositions of Mozart and Beethoven, or read aloud extracts from her favourite authors, or discussed the treasures of the Vatican, and described the peculiar beauties of Raphael, Correggio, Michael Angelo, Guido, and the long list of artists and sculptors who have been celebrated throughout the world. Italy was now become a familiar land to Margaret, and by degrees she learnt to regard it in the same light with the Countess, not merely as the great centre of historical associations, but as the seat and fountain-head of Christianity; for if it were enjoyment to enter into the Countess's feelings when she spoke of human arts and institutions, still more delightful was it to share the spirit of her devotion when she spoke of the Romish Church. Upon that subject above all others Beatrice loved to expatiate, yet not without prudence and forethought. She did not enter into argument, but she took pains to open Margaret's eyes to many of the exaggerations which hitherto had warped her judgment, when thinking of Romanists. Instructed by Father Andrea, the Countess was careful to set forth the theory rather than the practice of her Church, and this in its mildest form. Margaret learnt that indulgences were a remission of temporal canonical punishments, and, supposing this to mean simply the remission of ecclesiastical penances, she inquired no farther. Nothing was said to her of such inscriptions as that in the church of "S. Pietro in Carcere," at Rome, which grants every day to each one who shall visit it one thousand two hundred years of indulgence, doubled on Sundays and festivals, and moreover every day the remission of the third part of sins. She was taught to regard the titles of "Ark of the Covenant," "Gate of Heaven," "Refuge of Sinners," by which the blessed Virgin is addressed by Romanists, as founded entirely upon the worship of Him who condescended to be born of a woman; and

she did not seek to know whether such titles were sanctioned by the primitive Church, and whether they do not presuppose a knowledge (only to be obtained by revelation) of what the present state of the Mother of our Lord now is, together with her possession of that attribute of omnipresence which shall enable her to hear the prayers of all at all times. So again Margaret was informed that the Romish Church was infallible; but she did not ask that, which no one yet has been able to determine, where the infallibility lies. She heard it asserted that the early heresies were denounced by the Catholic Church, without pausing to doubt whether Catholic and Roman Catholic were synonymous terms, or whether the Bishop of Rome was at that time the supreme head of the Christian Church. She heard the Council of Trent placed on the same footing with the first General Councils, and it did not enter into her head to study its constitution, or to question how it could be a General Council, when so large a portion of the Christian world as the Greek Church was excluded from it. She was told that Romanism was identically the same as primitive Christianity, and knowing little of either, she took the assertion for granted, whilst at the same time she was unconsciously guilty of the gross unfairness of judging Rome by her theory, the English Church by her practice, and then in her own mind pronouncing one inferior to the other. But Margaret had no notion of arguing or controverting. She was led on insensibly and happily, and her life was too full of enjoyment to allow of her entertaining misgivings as to where all this would lead. Yet there were times when the idea was pressed upon her. Some grievous inconsistency in the English Church, or some attractive doctrine in the Romish, did now and then startle her with the thought — "It may be that I have been educated in error." And what did Margaret do? write to Mr. Sutherland? He was ill and away; his answers would be seen by her mother. Her inmost feelings, those most cherished and sacred, might thus be made the subject of common inspection and observation. Margaret thought that this could not be required of her. She considered it a reason for delay; her difficulties were as yet indefinite, and her early prejudices were strong; and in the meantime she put aside the convictions which were impressing themselves upon her conscience, yielded more and more to the attractions of the Countess's society, and proceeding onwards in the dangerous path, closed her eyes to the end to which it led, and almost believed that she did not know what it must be.

But autumn came, and Margaret feared that all her delights

would cease. The affections of the Countess, however, were now too much engrossed, and she was too well satisfied in fulfilling the duties which she had made for herself, to endure the thought of an absence from home during the winter months. She persuaded Father Andrea that her constitution was now inured to an English climate, and that, with a little precaution, Henningsley might be made as desirable a residence as Lady Anstruther's house in Devonshire, which she might again have visited, if it had been required. The confessor was easily brought to this opinion, for he also had formed occupations for himself, which, for the time, were sufficient to engage him. The Countess's Roman Catholic tenantry required his constant attention; the number of converts was increasing in some of the neighbouring towns, and as a man of superior talents and long experience, he was much looked up to by the priests of his own communion, with whom he had become acquainted in that part of the country, and felt himself as useful there as he might have been in a more visibly extensive sphere of action. All things seemed tending to the one point which he had so much at heart — Margaret's conversion; for when others were setting an example of a change of opinion, it was not likely that she would remain uninfluenced. To hear that any individual, whether educated or uneducated, had joined the communion of Rome, was an incentive to her to think more seriously upon the subject; and Father Andrea took care that no instance should remain unnoticed. He did more now than allude to these cases, he enlarged upon the circumstances, if they were at all likely to attract her notice, and, in general, finished by describing the beauty of some new chapel; or the excellent rules of some projected convent; or, by pointing out the advances towards the true faith which had been made within the last few years. Still, he ventured as yet no further. Margaret eagerly drank in all that he said, but her lips were closed; and Father Andrea would have been content to wait weeks and months, even years, rather than incur the risk of destroying, by a premature word or look, the confidence which it was his object to gain.

The Countess and Father Andrea were patient; but there was one other inmate of Henningsley whose spirit was by this time galled and wounded almost beyond endurance. Lucia Fontana could no longer be blind to the Countess's affection for Margaret —an English girl and a heretic. Her jealously had prophesied it from the first moment of their meeting, and the prophecy was now working to its completion. Lucia was nothing, Margaret was everything; and Lucia hated Margaret with the intensity

inherent in the character of the ardent nations of the South. Father Andrea knew this, and reproved, and warned; and the Countess guessed it, though not fully. Lucia's manner was but little altered; and the observations, which sometimes escaped her in disapprobation of Margaret or her family, were considered by Beatrice to be more the result of a passing annoyance than the indications of a rooted aversion. The family indeed were more avowedly the objects of Lucia's dislike than Margaret herself. She spoke openly against the one, whilst against the other she only insinuated. But whatever she might choose to state, she had an advantage over the Countess, for Beatrice had no power to contradict her. Through the intimacy with Mrs. St. Aubyn, Lucia obtained a knowledge of many traits of character which she knew would be particularly repugnant to the Countess's taste; and these were prominently brought forward whenever occasion offered. Beatrice had a particular dread of the money-getting, money-loving spirit of her countrymen, and even a loathing of the same disposition, when exhibited in persons of her own sex. Matrimonial speculations in such cases she considered as tainting the whole character; and if, when Lucia affirmed that the Percivals were a mercenary family, that the Doctor thought of nothing but making his fortune, and Mrs. Percival of contriving an economical show, the Countess was much pained; her disgust, when she heard from the authority of Mrs. St. Aubyn that Agatha had married for money, without a particle of affection, was, to Lucia's eyes, plainly and very satisfactorily apparent. Mrs. St. Aubyn had no idea of the use that would be made of the observations which from time to time she let fall before the young foreigner. She merely did with her as she had done with all her former protegées, she made her a confidante; and as the animosity between herself and Agatha was increasing in virulence, so it was, as a matter of course, known by Lucia. Margaret was not directly affected by this; but there is something contaminating in a family character. Beatrice could not for an instant believe that Margaret herself partook of the spirit she so much disliked; but it was very painful to hear it imputed to her relations. She wished, and now and then she thoughtlessly expressed the wish aloud, that Margaret was not a Percival; and then Lucia would sigh, and look mysterious, and wish the same; and when Margaret again appeared at Henningsley, the Countess found herself unconsciously weighing her words, and watching; until, wretched at the bare idea of suspicion, she bitterly reproached herself for unkindness,

and throwing herself with renewed animation into the subject under discussion, forgot in the charm of Margaret's presence that the doubt of a hidden fault had ever been presented to her mind.

CHAPTER XLVII.

We must once again imagine ourselves to have reached the beginning of January. A keen, biting wind was sweeping down the desolate streets of Staunton, and the thick grey sky was becoming heavier and more gloomy as the first flakes of a long-threatened snow-storm drifted lightly to the ground. Here and there one or two straggling, idle men, were standing with their hands in their pockets, beating their feet upon the pavement; and occasionally a charity school girl, wrapping her brown cloak about her, trudged quickly past, on her way to a poverty-stricken home; or a boy trundling his hoop, ran boldly in the middle of the road, rather delighting than not in the distant probability of being met by a slow-paced waggon or a taxed cart. Other vehicles and other persons there were none. It was one of those days on which the most determined pedestrians are inclined to cling to their firesides, and breathe a sigh of pity over those whom necessity exposes to the inclemency of the weather. Miss Debrett looked over her parlour blind, and called to her maid Susan to tell her whether she did not think it would snow before long. Susan was busy in the kitchen, and considered that the question would very well remain unanswered until she had finished putting away the dinner dishes; and on Miss Debrett's principle of never hurrying any one, she was allowed to continue undisturbed until the work was finished, when she appeared in the parlour, and, the question being repeated, she went to the window and reported that something was at that moment falling. Sleet, it looked like; but it was quite could enough for snow.

"So it is, Susan, as you say, quite cold enough; I thought we should have snow last night. My bed had not half sufficient clothes on it. Mind you put on another blanket to-night."

Susan stated that her mistress only possessed two spare blankets, and that the best of them had been lent. It was a hint that money might be usefully expended in the purchase of more; but Miss Debrett's purse was peculiarly empty at Christmas time. A few

bills, and a few pensioners, seldom failed to reduce her means of providing herself with comforts to a low ebb.

"To be sure, I forgot; but I must have my cloak instead; I wish every one could do as well, Susan."

Susan professed the same wish, and then went on to dilate upon the wants of the neighbourhood, and the exertions made to relieve them, saying that the Henningsley people were the best off of all, for the Countess looked after them as if they were her children; and when she could not do it, either the priest or Miss Percival was sure to be amongst them. People said it was strange of Miss Percival to go so much with the Romanists; but, for her part, she should like to see the day when other folks would only do half as much good.

"It is true, Susan; my dear Margaret is very good, but I should be glad to see her a little more cheerful. Young people should not have such grave heads upon their shoulders. I do think sometimes she must be in love."

Susan laughed, but declared she had never heard anything about it, and she should be sure to have done so if there was anything going on, for Baker told her everything.

"Well! I can't imagine what it can be, then," continued Miss Debrett, musingly. "She is not at all like the same creature she was, and she can have nothing now to make her anxious; dear Agatha and the child doing so well."

"And such a beautiful little thing, ma'am," said Susan. "Baker protests she has never seen such another, since Mrs. Clive was a baby herself; but then it's a girl!"

"A disappointment, Susan," said Miss Debrett, gravely; "but I hope Agatha will not fret about it, because it would not be right."

"It's the Colonel most, ma'am, I believe. He had set his heart upon it's being a boy."

"Very likely, Susan; but those things are not at our ordering." Miss Debrett spoke with marked seriousness, for she herself, one of a family of five daughters and no son, had early seen the effect which a parent's vexation from such a cause may have upon the character and happiness of his children. "I don't think it can be that which is upon Margaret's mind," she continued; "she speaks quite cheerfully about it, and always says how fond Agatha is of the baby. Perhaps it may be about her uncle; but then the last accounts were better. Certainly to be abroad for health is an anxious thing, and Mr. Sutherland was never like any one else, he was so thin."

In the middle of this speech Susan departed, for she knew it

was only meant as a soliloquy; and before her mental vision there happened to be at that moment a large kettle, fuming and boiling, and wasting its contents upon the kitchen floor, — perhaps even endangering the safety of the tabby cat, which she had left stretched at full length before the fire. Miss Debrett stayed a short time longer at the window, watching the snow, which was now falling fast. She had a desolate feeling at her heart, for that long afternoon and evening would, she supposed, be spent alone. Even Margaret's kindness could not be expeeted to brave a snow storm. But she was mistaken. Before she had made up her mind whether to take up a book, or some work, or to look over some old letters, or, in fact, in what way to occupy the lingering hours, a slight figure, enveloped in a wrapping plaid cloak, and sheltered by a large umbrella, was seen crossing the road; and Miss Debrett, recognising it with delight, hastened to open the front door herself, that "her dear Margaret" might not be kept waiting in the cold. "Come in, my love. How extremely good of you! But, dear me! how wet and damp you are! Here, Susan, take Miss Percival's cloak into the kitchen; and your shoes, my dear — are you sure those Gloucester boots have kept you dry? Just let me look."

Margaret assured her that she was perfectly protected, and Miss Debrett, kissing her, though scarcely looking in her face, led the way into the parlour, stirred the fire, put on some coals, and begged her to sit down and be comfortable. Poor Margaret! There was an old-fashioned glass hanging over the mantel-piece, and, as she caught a glimpse of her own countenance whilst standing before it, she almost started at its expression. It was a pale, care-fraught face; a mouth vainly striving to assume a smile, eyes dim and lustreless, and eyelids marked by the traces of tears. But Margaret was gifted with great powers of self-command, and whatever might be her hidden grief, it was not suffered to appear in the cheerful tone in which she said—"I knew you would be expecting a visitor this afternoon."

"No, my dear, not expecting. I could not have done that, you know, with the snow coming down so fast; but you are all the more welcome. And now, tell me how things are going on at home."

Margaret did not instantly reply, and Miss Debrett, for the first time remarking her attentively, perceived her look of distress. "My love, why, you are quite ill! How dreadful! what can it be?"

Margaret succeeded in a smile, said she was very well, but very

cold, and drew her chair nearer to the fire, so as to turn her countenance from the light.

"Cold! you are ghastly! You shall have a little warm wine and water directly. I don't think you ought to have come out such an afternoon as this; but you always are so kind."

Margaret did not refuse the wine and water, for the preparation occupied Miss Debrett's attention for some minutes, and in that time she tried to recover her natural expression.

"There, my dear," said Miss Debrett, placing on the table a tumbler of hot negus, and a plate of biscuits; "just try that, and tell me if it is sweet enough; and then let me know about you all. What is the news from Ashington?"

"Very good, indeed! Agatha is able to walk about as well as ever, and the baby grows delightfully."

"Dear little thing! I do long to see it again. And the Colonel, my dear,—is he quite well and happy?" "Quite well," Margaret allowed he was, the happiness she did not mention. "He will soon get over his disappointment in not having a boy," continued Miss Debrett. "Papas are always fond of little girls. Does he carry it about much?"

Margaret's sadness could not prevent her from laughing at the idea of Colonel Clive carrying a baby, and Miss Debrett laughed also, and much longer than Margaret. Her face became almost immediately grave again, and when Miss Debrett observed that the child must prove a great blessing, she only answered by a sigh.

"But I have forgotten your uncle, Margaret; you said you expected a letter from him."

"Yes, and we had one to-day; he is in Switzerland, and better."

"Better! that is very good news; and when does he talk of being in England again?"

"He does not say exactly; but he engaged his curate for six months. He thought it best to do so when he found himself ill at Mr. Morland's small living, because the physician said that if that little work was too much for him, he must need an entire long rest."

"And how charmed you will be to see him again! Let me think,—how long is it since he went away?"

"He exchanged duties with Mr. Morland in June," said Margaret; "and before that he had not been here for some weeks."

"No, I remember. What a pity it was he did not come over before he went abroad!"

"He could not," said Margaret; "he was too ill."

"Well! you will not have long to wait; the months slip by very

fast." Miss Debrett's sight was not clear, and she did not perceive Margaret's increased melancholy. She went on talking for some time very contentedly, and hearing everything which could be interesting.

"Her mother," Margaret said, "was very well, but anxious about Dr. Percival, who had seemed ill the preceding evening, yet had been kept at the house of a patient all night, and was not returned. It was decided at length that Philip should go to a preparatory school, and little Juliet was to become her pupil. Margaret was sorry to part with Philip, he was growing so tractable; but she considered it best for him, and Juliet would not be at all the worse for strictness."

"Little darling!" exclaimed Miss Debrett; "she is growing a great beauty; very like Agatha, I think. I wish she may have just as happy a lot in life." Again Margaret sighed. Miss Debrett's hopes and wishes certainly were most unfortunate. "And you are as busy as ever, my love? but you must miss going to Henningsley this weather."

Margaret replied that she did miss it very much; but that she had seen the Countess only the day before, and had engaged to dine and sleep there on the next Monday, as her mother had not been able to spare her for New Year's Day.

"Why that was natural," said Miss Debrett; "you always have such comfortable parties at home. It was very pleasant this time; but do you remember how happy we were last year? the Colonel and dear Agatha dining with us, and Mrs. St. Aubyn bringing me home in her carriage? All we wanted then was to have Craven and George to make up the party; but they seldom manage to be here till later."

At the mention of Craven's name, Margaret showed unconsciously that she was distressed. It was by a momentary contraction of the brow; but she answered quietly—"We expect George to-morrow."

"So soon! How pleasant! and how glad your uncle will be to know that George is doing well! He always said he was the clever one of the boys, and would make the best figure in the world."

"George is steady," observed Margaret, rather pointedly; "that is his chief merit. I really believe he has a great chance of a fellowship eventually, if he will go on as he has begun."

"So I have heard from several people. I think, Margaret, it was a good thing that your father did not put him with Mr. Dampier, in the merchant's office."

"It would not have suited him," replied Margaret. "His heart is devoted to the Church — more so now than ever; and Mr. Dampier is remarkably eccentric; they would not have done well together."

"Well, my love, I hope we shall live to hear George preach. That will repay you for all your anxiety about him — your father and mother, and you too; for I know you have had a good deal of thought for him at times. But you will forget it all then, it will be such happiness."

Margaret rose very suddenly, and took up her bonnet. "I must run away, now," she said, in a changed voice. "I had only twenty minutes to spare, when I came out."

"Only twenty minutes! — such a very short time. But I won't complain of you; it was more than I deserved that you should come at all. Just take a little more wine and water, though, before you go out — Susan can make it hot in a minute."

"None, thank you; really I must be quick. May I ring for my cloak?" The cloak and the Gloucester boots were brought, having been dried and warmed. Margaret was wrapped and pinned up, and it was almost insisted that Susan should go up the road with her to carry the umbrella; but the offer was steadily declined, and Margaret took leave, Miss Debrett watching her from the window till she was out of sight, to see that she did not slip.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

MARGARET had left her home to pay a short visit of kindness to a friend, oppressed indeed by care, yet without the prospect of any material alteration in her daily existence; but when she returned to it, the face of the servant who opened the door told a tale of alarm, which instantaneously conjured up no common fears. "My mistress has just sent for you, ma'am," were the few simple words which reached her ear, and there was a pause.

"Why, what! tell me what has happened," exclaimed Margaret, about to rush upstairs. Symonds respectfully put out his hand to stop her.

"If you will excuse me, ma'am, you will only be frightened. Mr. Harrison is here, and we hope my master will be better presently."

"Better, — papa! what do you mean?"

"We don't know quite what is the matter, ma'am," replied Symonds. "My master came in a little while ago and asked for his letters, and as he was reading them he looked very ill, and then he fell back and fainted. I was in the room at the time, and—"

Symonds did not conclude his sentence, for Margaret turned so pale that he could only place her in a chair, and hasten to fetch a glass of water.

"Oh, Craven!" involuntarily ejaculated Margaret. She stood up, and staggered rather than walked to the foot of the stairs. There was a noise in the lobby above, and it recalled her to herself. She heard her mother's voice; but had scarcely power to repeat her name so as to give notice that she was returned. Mrs. Percival was giving orders to a servant; quick as usual, and imperative,—but very nervous. "Mamma," said Margaret, with all the firmness she could rally; "stay, pray stay, I will come up."

Symonds appeared with the water; but was motioned away, and Margaret seeing that her mother was waiting for her, hastened, though with difficulty, to meet her.

"Your father is better rather, I hope, my love," began Mrs. Percival, forestalling Margaret's questions. "His pulse is a little recovering. Mr. Harrison has just left him."

"And you are not anxious, mamma?"

"I don't know—I can't say. Come here, my dear." Mrs. Percival moved with her usual rapidity across the lobby, opened a dressing-room door, made Margaret go in before her, then followed, and after turning the lock, sank into a chair, and exclaimed—"Oh! Margaret, happen what may, it is Craven's doing."

Margaret could not think of any comfort, for she was stunned. "When did papa see the letters?" she said at length.

"Directly he came in. I knew how he would take it to heart, if there were any upon this business. But, Margaret, we don't know the worst yet, I am sure. Let me hear again the letter you had from Craven this morning."

Margaret immediately produced it. "It is nothing but incoherency," she said, hoping that her mother would read the few lines to herself; but Mrs. Percival did not offer to do this, and Margaret was obliged to go on,—"'Margaret, I am in despair,—ruined.—I care not who knows it,—my father must immediately. Applications will be made to him. I am the major's debtor for two thousand pounds. Don't write to me. It matters not what becomes of me!' There is his signature at the bottom, and that is all."

"The creditors have written to your father," said Mrs. Percival, speaking slowly, as if each word was dragged from her; "there must have been extravagancies going on when the last crash happened. Craven never would be open."

"He must have been so now," said Margaret, bitterly.

Mrs. Percival groaned, and her hand shook very much, as she tried to rise from her chair. "I must go back to your father. Don't come, Margaret; you can do no good. Write to Ashington, and say his pulse is better; or, stay, — wait till we hear again what Mr. Harrison says an hour hence." Mrs. Percival was going away; but Margaret entreated that she might see her father, and could not be prevailed on to remain behind. Mrs. Percival was less positive than usual, and Margaret entered the chamber. The spectacle which presented itself was worse than she had expected. The change in that short space of time was great enough to shock her. She kissed her father; but he took no notice, and she turned aside unable to relieve herself by tears; then looked again, more steadfastly, more narrowly. The features seemed to recover something of their resemblance; but after a movement it was lost. Margaret stood fixed to the spot, till her mother's whisper aroused her.

"Margaret, there are the letters; look at them."

Margaret took them mechanically; but she could not gain the sense of their meaning. The words floated before her eyes. She saw something about accounts demanded, and never settled, and there was one letter from a personal friend of Dr. Percival's, stating that he feared his son was in great difficulties; but the details were unintelligible.

"You must go, my dear," said Mrs. Percival, approaching her, "there is nothing for you to do here."

Margaret asked for the children. They had been sent into the school-room, with orders not to come out of it till they were told. Margaret had better take care of them, and write to Ashington, and dine by herself. Her mother would not come down stairs, she was too anxious; and Dr. Percival was to have a warm bath immediately. Margaret gathered up the letters and went away to her own room. Alone, with the letters spread before her, she tried to make out the full extent of Craven's errors, but she soon found that the whole could not be known. It was clear that he had broken his promise and returned to the gaming-table. His own note gave that confession; and to one person his debt was two thousand pounds. He must have been desperate before he ventured to play so high; probably he might owe more. The

creditors' bills seemed to be of long standing. "Bill delivered" Margaret read repeatedly. She suspected that Craven, instead of satisfying them when his father had before agreed to pay his debts, had only rid himself of some of the most pressing claims, and kept the rest of the money for his personal expenses. The idea was full of anguish, for such conduct could not be called anything but dishonourable. He might perhaps have made plausible excuses to himself, but there was nothing really to extenuate it. Margaret, however, tried not to judge, though she could not but fear that Craven's natural weakness of character might induce him to yield to any temptation under an immediate pressure. It was certain at least that he had broken a positive promise, and Margaret's susceptible conscience was instantly awake to the question, whether she might not have prevented it. Her letters had been cold and uninteresting, merely confined to home details about which Craven cared very little; whilst his in return were hasty scraps, sometimes written in great excitement, sometimes merely saying that he was well, and that his regiment had been ordered to such a place. Margaret blamed herself in part; but it was clear that a public correspondence such as her mother insisted hers should be, was not one likely to do any good to her brother. She had occasionally reminded him of his engagement; but she did not like to do so often, since he was naturally tenacious of interference from a younger sister. The exact degree in which she might have exerted herself could not be determined, and in consequence a portion of self-reproach was added to the bitterness of her sorrow. And very bitter it was. Margaret knew that neither her father nor her mother would allow Craven ultimately to take the consequences of his actions. They would complain and be miserable; but Craven would be set free, and his family would be the sufferers. This was the very best that could be anticipated; and if worse things should happen,—if Dr. Percival's illness were really to prove serious, what was to become of his family? George at College, Philip to be educated, all the expenses of an establishment to be kept up. The insurances might be considerable, but they were not likely to be sufficient for such emergencies. Margaret was full of forebodings; but it seemed selfish and cold-hearted to think of such things rather than of her father's possible danger, and the pecuniary cares were soon driven away by the more immediate anxiety, while she tried to rouse her sinking faith and believe that all would be well, because all was appointed in mercy. There was a quaint sentence of Jeremy Taylor's, which had formerly forcibly

impressed itself upon her memory, and which was now recalled to assist in chasing away the cloud of mistrust that made still darker the prospect of her father's illness. "It is certain that man wants faith who dares be more confident of being supplied when he hath money in his purse, than when he hath it only in bills of exchange from God." Margaret said the words over; but they were followed by a sense of wretchedness so great, that in agony she threw herself upon her knees, not daring to utter a prayer, but seeking only that the attitude of supplication might be pitied and accepted.

Faith—the faith of a Protestant—was it rightly grounded? Could she believe that God would be with her in trial, if she were wilfully an alien from the true Church? Margaret had at length reached the point at which inclination is followed by real doubt, and it was now that the struggle was beginning. Now, in sickness and sorrow, when the utmost comforts of religion were needed for her support, her mind was to be torn by conflicting feelings; opposing wills; abstruse reasonings. Yet, what right had she to murmur? She had brought it upon herself. In the day of prosperity she had dallied with temptation; in the day of adversity she was permitted to feel its power. There are certain stages both in conviction and action, which are reached only by slow degrees, but beyond which the progress is very rapid. Six months with the Countess and Father Andrea; six months' study of Romish books, and use of Romish devotions; and six months of clever argument, aided by the most endearing affection, had—not completed the work of conversion,—Margaret was by no means convinced,—but raised such a tumult of doubt, that the truths upon which she had formerly rested were often shaken to their foundation. Within the last two months Margaret had entered upon religious subjects more openly in conversation, from curiosity—to please the Countess—because she was dissatisfied with the state of the English Church—neither reason in the least justifiable for tampering with a creed which she had been taught was erroneous; she continued it under the belief that Romanism would suit her particular turn of mind; because the ardent expressions put into her mouth by the devotional books which she was accustomed to use, served to elevate her feelings; because she admired the self-denying lives portrayed in the Romish saints; and had learnt to think that scourgings, and fastings, and a voluntary deprivation of every comfort of life, must be in themselves virtues. She was now to go one step beyond. When the solace of religion was most necessary, the fearful inquiry arose clearly,—"Is there

truth in the Church to which I belong?" This inquiry had been strenuously urged upon her by the Countess, on the preceding day. Margaret rejected it by a positive assertion which she felt was nothing more than assertion, and on her return home tried to satisfy herself by her own arguments, but could find none. The English Church had not been thoroughly examined, and Margaret had little to say for it. With Romish arguments, on the contrary, she had been carefully furnished; they presented themselves again and again. Still there were some almost incredible doctrines, and others very confusing. In such a state of bewilderment, where should she find assistance? Mr. Sutherland was her natural adviser; but he was far distant. To know that she was in the least wavering might, in his weakened state of health, be injurious to him; and a private correspondence would be very difficult. Besides, Margaret questioned whether such a step would be right. She fancied herself improved, less worldly, more earnest and watchful, since she had known the Countess, followed her opinions, studied her books, and pursued a stricter course of discipline. Yet there was no doubt that Mr. Sutherland would require her to relinquish, some, at least, of these apparent means of good. Margaret's distress of mind had been extreme from indecision, and in the present season of sorrow it became unendurable. A half hour of anguish was spent before she could in the least find comfort. During that time family anxieties weighed upon her mind; but there was nothing to give relief. Words of prayer rose to her lips, but doubt arrested them; and at length, finding that devotion could give her no alleviation, whilst conscience accused her of weakness and insincerity, she strove to forget all her other trials, and determine how she was to act with regard to this, the greatest of all. She might go at once to Father Andrea. He would be delighted to listen to her, for he had before implied as much; but Margaret had never yet been able to confess to what a degree her belief in the English Church was shaken. Pride and reserve had kept her back. Yet something must be done, and, as explanation and instruction seemed that which she most needed, and it was certain he could give both, Margaret at length satisfied her conscience by resolving clearly to understand her own difficulties; to think them over, and write them down, and then apply to the confessor. The plan would take time; but she thought it most likely to be satisfactory in the end, for, with her present confusion of ideas, it was probable that conversation would only render the controverted points more perplexing. This being settled, she was once more comparatively at rest. She could pray,

and hope that her prayers might be accepted; or if the question did arise, as to the safety and wisdom of the course she was adopting — not seeking the guidance of a clergyman of her own Church, but referring for aid to a priest of the Church of Rome, thus following her own will rather than the course indicated by Providence,— it was answered by the remembrance that she was not deciding — only inquiring; as if human reason can be uninfluenced by the opinions of those of whom it seeks counsel. Margaret, however, was, for the time being, satisfied. She could think of the children; and write to Ashington; but before any other claim, she recollected Beatrice, and, regardless of the weather, prepared a note which might be conveyed to Henningsley by the Ashington messenger, although the distance between the two places was considerable. Where the Countess was concerned she had little thought of difficulty either in giving or taking trouble. It was a long and dreary evening which followed, but there was some comfort at the close of it. Dr. Percival was pronounced much better, and Margaret went to bed hoping that, as before, the threatened evils might pass away.

CHAPTER XLIX.

A FEW days afterwards the Countess and Lucia were sitting together in the little room which Beatrice had lately had fitted up for her especial use. It was her usual retreat when Margaret was with her, and Lucia looked upon it for that reason with a jealous eye. She was cheerful, however, at this particular moment, occupying herself with some work which was to be given to Mrs. St. Aubyn; whilst the Countess at another table was planning a school-house, in which the children of her Romanist tenantry were to be educated gratuitously. The occupation was interesting to her in itself, and more so because Margaret had assisted in the plans. Yet her attention was not given to it fully, for her eye often wandered to the door; and when at length a servant entered with a note, she rose hastily to take it from him, and opening it instantly, read it at once, without returning to her seat. Lucia looked inquiringly, but asked no questions.

"Dr. Percival is a good deal better, but still extremely weak," said the Countess, aloud.

Lucia went on with her work, remarking that "it was a fear-

fully sudden illness. Mrs. St. Aubyn thought it must have been something mental which caused it."

"Very likely; Dr. Percival has a great deal of anxiety with his patients."

"And with his family," replied Lucia. "Mrs. Clive is ill, and out of spirits."

"I thought she was quite recovered," said the Countess.

"Yes, as far as strength goes; but she appears very wretched."

"The Colonel's fault," began the Countess; but Lucia interposed—

"Ah, Signora, he has enough to try him. It must be sad to have such a selfish wife."

This was the frequent style of conversation, and Beatrice could not bear it.

"The Percivals have all such notions of spending money," continued Lucia, "which is the reason they are so anxious to have it."

"That is what you always say, Lucia," replied the Countess, coldly. "Can you tell me nothing new?"

"Pardon me Signora; I was not aware I should displease you."

"You do not displease me, Lucia; whatever you hear, it is a matter of indifference to me; but I should like to think you had something better to occupy your thoughts."

Lucia bit her lip; she had lately become very tenacious of reproof. "I only supposed, Signora," she replied, with some pride in her manner, "that you might be interested in hearing about the family, on account of Miss Percival; and Mrs. St. Aubyn told me yesterday that she had guessed the cause of Dr. Percival's illness."

"And what was it?" inquired Beatrice, not able to conceal her curiosity.

"The eldest son has been extravagant again," replied Lucia; "Mrs. St. Aubyn heard it from a cousin who is in the same regiment. They say he will ruin his father."

The Countess showed unconsciously that the information annoyed, as well as distressed her. "Are you sure you are speaking from good authority, Lucia?" she inquired.

"I am repeating what I heard, Signora; and I know that Mrs. Clive has more money from her husband than she can possibly spend; and Mrs. St. Aubyn imagines a great deal of it must have gone to this brother. They are a needy race."

The Countess put aside her drawing, and went to look at the

weather. She seemed full of thought, and Lucia, not meeting with a reply, continued, marking attentively, as she spoke, the effect which she produced. "Miss Percival, of course, is an exception to her family. She must be very much vexed to see things going on in the way they do. The son is constantly at the gaming-table; and they say that his dealings are not always honourable."

"Did Mrs. St. Aubyn tell you so?" asked the Countess, quickly.

Lucia coloured. "No, I forget whom I heard that from; it was not Mrs. St. Aubyn. She only remarked upon the family faults, the love of money and extravagance joined."

Beatrice again resumed her drawing, and Lucia, believing that she had given sufficient food for thought, went away. The Countess was unhappy, and she could no longer find amusement in her occupation. It was hateful to hear Margaret's name mixed up with others in such a familiar way. One of a worldly-minded, needy family! — the position was so unsuited to her, free, as she was, from the same faults. Yet there seemed no hope of rescuing her. She must live with them always; share their reputation; bear with their follies; perhaps, at length, learn to imitate them. The Countess meditated sadly upon the lot destined for one whom she loved so truly. What would she not have given for the hope of Margaret as her constant companion! But it would be impracticable, unless — there was a hope, perhaps not a distant one — if Margaret's faith were changed; if her own home were under such circumstances to be rendered miserable; then Beatrice might come forward to her aid. There would be no vow to interpose between her wishes and their accomplishment. All that she possessed might be shared with the friend she loved; and Margaret might be with her constantly. Now there was always a check upon the Countess's generosity, and her vow was becoming daily more irksome. Father Andrea had not reproved her for this, but he used it to stimulate her efforts for Margaret's conversion; and in her enthusiasm the Countess had at length learnt to overlook every previous or accompanying suffering, and to think only of what she deemed Margaret's most important interests. Beatrice drew a bright picture of happiness for them both, and did not even ask herself whether their home should be in England or in Italy; but suddenly her face grew paler, her brow contracted with pain, she put her hand to her side, and leant back on the sofa. It was but a spasm; she had experienced it frequently since the weather became cold; or perhaps it might only be nervousness.

Father Andrea came into the room, and she rallied, and addressed him cheerfully; told him the news from the Grove, and added that Margaret would, if possible, see her that very afternoon; and then she forced herself to repeat what Lucia had said, observing that whether the facts were true or not, they were equally injurious for Lucia to hear, as they encouraged a criticising, gossiping spirit. Father Andrea looked gloomy; for, in his last private interview with Lucia, he had reprimanded her more severely than usual, for her uncharitable temper. His words seemed to have been thrown away, and the penances he had enjoined had been of little avail."

"I really cannot sacrifice my happiness and Margaret's, father," said the Countess, "to Lucia's fancies. I foresee we shall be compelled to separate."

"Poor girl!" replied the confessor, with an air of compassion.

"Yes, I know it would be very dreadful to her; and it would, on many accounts, be most painful to me; but it must be injurious for her to remain where her jealousy is always fretting; and we may hope that the separation may bring her to a sense of duty. At any rate, it would be very hard if Margaret were to suffer for her."

"Very hard, indeed; Miss Percival will soon have sufficient to undergo, without adding to the burden."

"Her father is better," said Beatrice.

"Apparently, for the time; but I hear it is doubtful whether he will ever be as he was before."

"The note does not say so," observed the Countess, opening it again; "it is full of hope."

"Miss Percival is coming to give her own report," replied Father Andrea; "I see her at the shrubbery gate."

The Countess's impulse was instantly to go and meet her; but Father Andrea stopped, and in a tone of command insisted that she should on no account run the risk of cold. He would himself be the first to welcome Miss Percival again at Henningsley.

"You are looking ill, Margaret," said the Countess, fondly, as she sat down on a low stool by Margaret's side, when the confessor had left them together. "Yet it is no wonder, considering all you have suffered."

"A short suffering," replied Margaret, forcing herself to smile; "but oh, Beatrice! that dreadful day! I shall never forget it!"

"And you are sure it is all over now?" said the Countess; "that there is no more cause for anxiety?"

"We hope not. My father does not regain his strength rapidly; but that is all."

"And your mother, and the children, and your brothers?"

Margaret looked more ill at ease than before, and Beatrice noticed it directly.

"You have too many home cares, Margaret. I would give very much to help you."

"No one can help me," replied Margaret. "Let me try to forget them whilst I am with you."

"Can you do so? yet I would rather share them with you, if I might."

"Dear Beatrice, that is impossible. Many you would not understand, and others I could not tell. I must keep the burden of my own sorrows."

"And I have told you all mine," said the Countess, reproachfully.

"Yes, but how different they are! great and ennobling; mine are of this world. I could not bear to mention them before you."

"And where, then, is our confidence, Margaret? you once promised me yours."

"I have given it you," replied Margaret. "As far as I myself am concerned, I have told you everything. But where subjects relate to other individuals I must be silent."

"And leave me to gain what I can from hearsay?" answered the Countess, remembering Lucia's information.

"You will not be unjust to me, Beatrice, I know," replied Margaret; "I do not believe it is in your nature; and you would not willingly add to my wretchedness. Yes," she added, and tears gathered in her eyes, "I may well say it—I am very wretched."

The Countess's manner in a moment recovered its former tenderness. "Margaret, I would not for the world reproach you," she said; "but if there were no mystery, your grief might at least be lightened."

"There is no mystery," replied Margaret, "as regards my present feelings. I have been thinking too much, I believe; my mind is bewildered, and so when trial comes, I am the less able to bear it."

A sudden joy lighted up the Countess's face; but it died away when she again glanced at Margaret. "Dear child!" she exclaimed in a tone of affectionate compassion; "it must be very sad for you; yet I am thankful that you do think."

"Yes," said Margaret, whilst her voice faltered, "I do, indeed,

think. Morning, noon, and night, the idea is before me, in some form; but I cannot feel as I know that you would wish. I can doubt, but I can find no certainty. Truth is gone from me—it is nowhere."

"It is but the darkness which precedes the glorious light," said the Countess.

"Or is it the prelude to a still greater darkness? Beatrice, I have never seriously thought that you might be right till within the last few days, and in these there have been fearful, horrible moments! My brain could not stand many such."

"We can both pray," said the Countess, gently.

"Not in those moments," replied Margaret, shuddering at the recollection of her anguish. "There is no power then to help; none, none in heaven or earth. May God in mercy pardon me! but if I am an alien from His Church, how will my prayers be accepted? Beatrice, I was once warned, that there might be danger in your society. Is it love for you, or for the truth, which bids me doubt?"

"Who but yourself would ask the question?" replied the Countess. "If it were love for me there would be no doubt, my creed would long since have been yours. But truth is almighty, it cannot be resisted."

Margaret buried her face in her hands without answering.

"Father Andrea will be your best guide, dearest," said the Countess; "let me ask him to come to you."

"In a minute; spare me a little. I am not equal to argument. Are you sure my love for you is not the snare?"

Margaret did not look up, and the Countess knew not how to satisfy her.

"If I might mention your difficulties for you," she said, after a short pause.

"I could scarcely explain them," replied Margaret, raising her head, and speaking more calmly. "They meet me on all sides, and at all times; and again, there is a power impelling me to go forward; urging me even against my will. It tells me that there is no safety where I now am."

The Countess sighed heavily.

"You think so," exclaimed Margaret, "I know you must."

Just then the door opened, and Father Andrea came into the room. He took up a book from the table, and apologised for interrupting them, yet still lingered as if willing to be drawn into conversation.

"Can you not understand our satisfaction in meeting, father?"

said the Countess, with a smile. "The week we have been parted seems an age."

"I can understand a great pleasure in meeting Miss Percival at any time," said the confessor, courteously; "yet I own it would be greater if I could believe that she had suffered less in the interim."

"My tell-tale face," replied Margaret, striving to speak cheerfully. "As a child, I could never conceal when anything was the matter."

"Your friends would not wish that you should," said Father Andrea. "They would rather, if they could, assist you to bear your grief."

"I have been seeking to persuade her of that, father," observed the Countess, "but I can gain nothing."

"Oh, Beatrice!" exclaimed Margaret, reproachfully, "you do not then value personal confidence?"

"I do not consider it mine," said the Countess. "It should rather be Father Andrea's."

The last words were spoken with hesitation, and the Countess looked at Margaret, to see whether she had gone too far; but there was no change of manner, and no attempt at expostulation. Beatrice rose and left the room; and Father Andrea, advancing to the fire-place, stood for a few moments in thought. He saw that the Countess had a meaning in her action; but he could not discover whether his advice was really desired. Margaret's eyes were bent on the ground, and there did not appear any inclination on her part to begin the conversation.

"The Countess spoke of confidence," he said, at length; "I am the last person who has a right to ask it of you; and yet something in her manner made me think that, perhaps, I might be of service."

"So far the Countess is right," replied Margaret, in assumed composure, "that you can certainly give me information upon some subjects which have been a difficulty to me lately; but I would on no account interrupt you, when you are, probably, engaged. Any time will suit me, and my own visit must now be short. We had better defer a conversation for the present."

"Excuse me," replied the confessor, "but, unless at your particular desire, I would on no account allow this opportunity to pass. We are but creatures of the day, Miss Percival, and to-morrow may never be ours."

Margaret was more agitated than she was willing to show. It was not now as when, once before, she had forced herself to be

candid with her uncle. Mr. Sutherland's manner was simple and open, and there was no suspicion in her mind that she might be doing wrong; but Father Andrea's sternness was only partially concealed by his marked civility, and as he fixed his searching eye upon her, conscience awoke in her breast, to warn her that she might be doing wrong in consulting him.

"They are abstruse points," she said, finding that the subject could not be avoided, "upon which I was wishing for information. We have touched upon them occasionally; but I still cannot gain any clear idea of the doctrine of the Romish Church concerning them. The Countess referred me to you; but I really am ashamed to ask you to enlighten my ignorance."

Margaret's tone was indifferent; but the confessor was too keen an observer of human nature to be deceived by it.

"All such subjects," he replied, "demand my utmost attention. There cannot be an engagement which I would not, if possible, postpone, to enter upon them; but I am really now perfectly at leisure. Pray let me hear your difficulties."

Margaret felt, as she had before said to the Countess, that she could scarcely explain them. They were many; and yet they had lately, since she had listened to the conversation of Romanists, become vague. Some plausible arguments in their support, she had already heard, introduced, to all appearance, casually, but never in reality, without a meaning, and she did not like to own that they had not been convincing. Father Andrea again pressed for an answer.

"It would give him such pleasure," he said, "to be in any way an assistance to her."

Margaret half reproached herself for cowardice; yet again evading a direct reply, she answered, "that it had not been her intention to trouble him with any discussion on that day; her time was too limited to admit of it; but that on another occasion she might perhaps ask his attention. If he did not think it too exacting, she might write to him."

The confessor's face was for an instant clouded. He trusted more to the eloquence of his conversation than to written arguments, especially as he did not know what secret opponents might be in wait to refute them. He could not, however, decline the proposition, nor urge Margaret to be explicit at once; but his manner involuntarily changed, and Margaret was vexed at perceiving it.

"Do not think me ungrateful," she said, whilst a deep crimson spread itself over her cheek. "The very kindness you have shown

me has made me bold in troubling you, when—" she paused, and added less firmly—"when I am unhappy."

Father Andrea slowly repeated the last word:—"Unhappy!—and on what account? Yet, pardon me, I would not require an explanation." He held out his hand, which Margaret took, and whilst she almost shrank from the fixedness of his gaze, he added, "Unhappiness, where the salvation of the soul is concerned, may end in misery by delay." He then left her, and Margaret, sinking into a chair, gave way to a burst of grief. That word delay had struck upon a chord of bygone days. In a moment—clearly, as if all had passed but yesterday—she stood by her uncle as she had done on the evening after their long conversation at Deering, and heard in tones of the gentlest, most anxious affection, the warning voice, "Margaret, love, this world was not meant for delay." And the hours that followed—the deep thought, and careful self-examination; the hearty resolutions, and fervent prayers; Margaret recalled them all. They had been the fruits of the first warning, what would be the result of the second? A Romanist!—how would Mr. Sutherland bear it? The soft voice of the Countess broke upon her sorrow. "My own Margaret, this is most wretched. Has Father Andrea been no comfort to you?"

"Do not blame me, Beatrice; it may be miserable weakness, but I could not tell him: I will write."

Beatrice looked annoyed; for, like the haughty Viscountess de Lisle, she could pity, but she could not sympathise with weakness.

"Father Andrea is vexed, I know," continued Margaret: "he must think that I am trifling; but my tongue seemed tied, and I was not prepared."

"You will write to him, though," said the Countess, gravely.

"When I can; but, Beatrice, you little know the state of my home at present: it is not peaceful like yours, and my time is not my own for a single hour. I am working without rest for mind or body during the day, and at night I am too weary to collect my thoughts."

"But such a state of things cannot be right," said the Countess.

"It is unavoidable: my mother depends upon me for everything, and I am bound to exert myself, for she has heavy causes of anxiety."

"And in the meantime the interests of the soul are to be neglected," said Beatrice, in a tone which she did not intend to be reproachful, but which sounded so in Margaret's ears.

"Not quite, I hope," she replied, a little proudly; "I can and must always find leisure for prayer: I could not support the life

I do without it; and, Beatrice, I can also find leisure for doubts —miserable doubts."

The suppressed wretchedness with which this was said touched the Countess greatly, whilst it induced her to press still further the necessity of Margaret's taking some steps to satisfy herself. But Margaret would not promise; for she did not like to bind herself, though fully intending to carry out her original idea, and Beatrice was in consequence dissatisfied. The rapid energy of her mind had already carried her to the conclusion that the work was accomplished, and her strength of will could not brook opposition. Margaret saw her disappointment, and it added to her grief. "Strive to have patience with me, Beatrice," she said, humbly. "You have never borne my trial. Let me suit it to my own powers of endurance, or I may sink under it."

She rose to depart, and the Countess, endeavouring to conceal her regret at what appeared to be instability of purpose, made no further mention of Father Andrea. She only begged that if they did not meet she might hear from Margaret every day. A servant would call at the Grove, and she should be anxious to learn Dr. Percival's progress. Of the progress of Margaret's mind the Countess then deemed it advisable to say nothing.

CHAPTER L.

A FRESH call upon Margaret's time and thoughts awaited her at home, — a note from Agatha, sent with the carriage which was to take her to Ashington. Colonel Clive was dining out, and Agatha could not be happy unless her sister went to spend the evening with her. Margaret did not hesitate in complying with the request. Her presence she knew might be spared for that one evening. George was at the Grove, having arrived the day previous; Dr. Percival, therefore, would not want a cheerful companion, and indeed George might be almost more useful than herself in amusing his father. Business was out of the question; Dr. Percival could not yet enter into the detail of Craven's affairs; any allusion to them seemed more than he could sustain; but Mrs. Percival had, upon her own responsibility, written to the friend from whom the principal information had been received, announcing her husband's illness, and giving the idea that something might eventually be done to extricate Craven, and entreating

that in the meantime, although she would not write to him herself, he might not be driven to extremities by being allowed to think his condition desperate. Margaret did not know whether this was a right mode of proceeding; but it was exactly what she had expected, and she trusted that the sacrifice her father might think it right to make would at last serve its purpose in reclaiming Craven from extravagance, and especially from the gaming-table. If this were done, no privations would be worthy of a thought.

"I should have seen Agatha myself to-day," said Mrs. Percival, when she was asked to allow Margaret to go to Ashington, "if your father had been well enough to be left. But he has kept me engaged all the afternoon. I am afraid, from what Mr. Harrison says, the baby is not quite well."

"Nothing serious the matter I hope, mamma," replied Margaret, alarmed directly at the prospect of anything happening which might disturb the only comfort her sister now found in life.

"No, my dear, not serious; but you know babies are always troublesome. Mr. Harrison says that Agatha is fidgetty, which is natural enough. He thinks himself that it is a mere trifle, and he must know best."

"He must know best," said Margaret to herself, as she went to her room; but though she said it, she did not assent to it. Trials seldom or never come alone. Perhaps there was another to be added to those which were already impending over them. Margaret's was not a common love for her sister's child. In its simple innocence and unconsciousness it seemed sent to awaken in its mother's breast a deeper affection than she had yet known; and when Margaret sometimes watched the unwearied fondness with which Agatha hung over her infant, and heard her speak of the nights and days which were spent in its service, without a murmur, she almost reverenced the fragile, helpless little being who had been the means of effecting so great a change. For its own sake she could have cherished it, and for Agatha's she delighted in it; and the only sorrowful thoughts that it ever brought were occasioned by seeing the indifference with which it was regarded by Colonel Clive; then, indeed, Margaret was not only sad, but indignant. She could allow for the first disappointment of a weak, proud man, whose heart was fixed upon the hope of continuing his estate in the direct line; but she could not overlook the neglect of Agatha, or the cruelty of visiting an appointment of Providence upon his child. Margaret had often experienced a difficulty in being charitable to Colonel Clive; but the difficulty was now tenfold increased; and as Agatha's un-

happiness became daily more and more visible and settled, her voluntary share in her own sufferings was, in her sister's eyes, almost expiated. When alone with her baby Agatha would smile and talk cheerfully; but the distant sound of her husband's step, the mere expectation of seeing him, brought restraint and irritation, and a despondency of manner, which Margaret trembled to see. Such a state of things could not go on always; and what would be the end?

Margaret found Agatha, as she had anticipated, alone; her spirits were worse even than in general. She had been in tears. Margaret inquired the cause, and was taken to the nursery, where the child was lying in its cradle. Agatha pointed to the flushed cheek, and said there was a good deal of fever. Margaret did not see any particular signs of illness; but Agatha was not pleased to receive such comfort. It seemed as if Margaret did not care for her. "It was true," she said, "that Mr. Harrison considered the case trifling; but he had had very little experience with children. If her father could only have seen it, or her mother, even!"

Margaret repeated Mrs. Percival's remark, and Agatha received some satisfaction from finding that a person of experience like hers had taken Mr. Harrison's opinion. "But the thing which made her anxious," she said, "was, that the child had been drooping for several days."

"We did not hear of it," replied Margaret.

"Indeed I sent you word. But I don't think you have, any of you, been able to attend to other people since my father's illness. I gave several messages and had no answer."

Margaret discovered an absence of placidity in her sister's tone, and did not offer any further opinions about the baby. Dinner was announced, and they sat down together, in the large dining-room, with attendants more than convenience required. The dishes were carried away almost untasted. Agatha professed to have lost her appetite, started at the least sound, fancying her baby might be crying, and turned pale when a servant's voice sounded like the Colonel's; and Margaret, for form's sake, went through the ceremony of eating, and tried to engage her sister in conversation, when a weight like lead was upon her heart, and in her own mind she was reasoning upon some of the doubtful points on which she had postponed consulting Father Andrea.

Agatha went to the nursery again as soon as dinner was over, and Margaret had full leisure for meditation till her sister returned. She endeavoured to read; but reading had lately

become a source of disquiet rather than of amusement. When the mind is engrossed by one idea, all subjects are found to bear upon it; and whether it were history, poetry, biography, or fiction, with which Margaret sought to occupy herself, the Romish controversy was still perpetually discovered in all. Coffee was brought and tea made before Agatha re-appeared. Mr. Harrison, she then stated, had called again, according to her request, and persisted in his opinion that there was but little amiss. Margaret hoped Agatha was more comfortable; but Agatha still insisted that Mr. Harrison was not a sufficient authority. She should not have consulted him, had there been any other medical man near. A silence of some minutes followed this observation, when Agatha suddenly exclaimed — "I have thought of one thing. Colonel Clive goes to London next week." Margaret looked up surprised. "I mean," said Agatha, smiling faintly at her sister's wonder, "that I can go too, and we can have advice."

If Margaret's thoughts had been expressed, they would have been pity for a mother's fanciful weakness; but it was too pleasant to witness genuine feeling in Agatha for her to wish to check it. "It will be a good plan," she said, "if the child is not better to-morrow; but I really trust she will be."

Agatha was pleased not to be contradicted, and being relieved by the determination, began to converse more fully upon her father's illness, and Craven's affairs, saying, with a bitterness of manner which she did not strive to repress, that "she was glad the Colonel had never been induced to lend him money. The storm would have fallen upon her now, if he had. Of all things, the Colonel disliked being asked for money."

"Most people do," observed Margaret.

"Ah, yes; but that is quite different. You do not know him, Margaret, and how should you?"

Margaret could not help remembering that her sister's knowledge had been voluntarily acquired; and perhaps Agatha remembered it also, for she heaved a heavy sigh, and passed her hand across her eyes to wipe away a tear. Margaret was standing near her, and stooping down, kissed her forehead. There were many tears now in Agatha's eyes, and as they fell, she did not try to stop them. To Margaret this was the strangest sight of all. Her cold, proud sister, how much must her spirit have been broken, before such an exhibition of weakness could have been allowed!

"It is only for the baby I care, Margaret," said Agatha. "I could treat him as he deserved, when I alone was concerned; but

I cannot—cannot bear his manner now. I will not," she added, more firmly; "no woman is called upon to bear it."

"Oh, Agatha!" said Margaret, with great gentleness.

"You are not a wife, Margaret; and it is very well for you to tell me that I must submit. Could you do it yourself?" Margaret left the question unanswered, but, in her own mind, trusted that she should never have put herself in a position to make submission difficult. "There is a home still open to me," continued Agatha. "My father could not refuse to receive me; and I believe —yes, I firmly believe—that Colonel Clive would consent,—and willingly."

Margaret was inexpressibly shocked. She had sometimes endeavoured to imagine what might happen if Agatha and her husband should continue their present wretched life, and the possibility of an ultimate separation had once or twice occurred to her; but it had been instantly rejected as too repugnant to every better feeling to be entertained. Now, to hear the idea voluntarily suggested by the person who was especially bound to be meek and submissive, was altogether revolting, and took from her the power of remonstrance.

"You think, I know, Margaret," continued Agatha, interpreting her sister's silence, "that I can bear more than I do. I wish you were married, and then you would be a better judge."

"I do not wish to judge any one, dear Agatha," replied Margaret; "and no one can feel for you more than I do. But I do not like to talk upon such a subject, seriously. I dare say at times you fancy——"

Agatha interrupted her in the middle of the sentence. "Hark! surely that was the Colonel's voice?—and only nine o'clock! What can have made him return so early?" Margaret listened. It was the Colonel, speaking to the servant in the harsh dictatorial tones which were natural to him. "Good bye to our quiet evening," said Agatha, "unless he is ill, and will go to bed."

The Colonel's firm tread was not at all "invalidish." Agatha supposed he was wearied with his party, and preferred coming home, to indulge himself in an easy chair and a nap by the fire. She was herself sitting in the chair which he always chose, as being the most comfortable; but she did not think it worth while to move. The Colonel entered, looking gloomy and headachy. As Agatha had imagined, he had found his party dull; but that was not the reason of his return. "He did not feel well. Dull though it was, it could not be worse out than at home." Margaret asked if he had had tea; Agatha took no notice of him. "One

cup of coffee," he said, "he had tasted, but it was not drinkable. No one made good coffee in England."

"Except your servants," observed Margaret, knowing that he piqued himself upon his coffee, which really was remarkably good.

"That is because I taught them how to do it myself. I had Hunter into my room every day for a fortnight, to give him proper instructions."

Agatha was inclined to be satirical, but Margaret said that good coffee was a great treat, and asked if she might ring the bell for some for him. Colonel Clive was frequently mollified by Margaret's tact, and it might have been a problem whether, under such judicious management, he could not have been metamorphosed into an amiable man. But then, as Agatha had remarked to Margaret, she was not a wife, and the patience of an unmarried relation cannot be a fair criterion of the extent of forbearance which is necessary in order to live peaceably with a husband who requires management. Probably if Margaret had been Mrs. Clive, she would have been as irritated with the Colonel as her sister was.

Margaret was a little curious to know Agatha's thoughts during this time. She leant back in her chair; but she was not asleep, and in general she was not given to meditation. Just, however, as the Colonel was looking round for his own seat, and upon the point of bidding her relinquish it, she started up, saying,—"When do you go to town, Colonel Clive?"

"The week after next, probably."

"Then I shall go with you." The Colonel opened his eyes very wide. "I want advice for baby," continued Agatha; "she is not at all well, and I cannot trust Mr. Harrison."

"Ridiculous nonsense!" exclaimed the Colonel: "what fancy will you have next?"

"It is no fancy. The child has been exceedingly feverish and fretful; is so indeed now, and she is quite falling away. In short, I must have an opinion about her."

"'Must' is a very hard word," said the Colonel, and he glanced at the easy chair. Whilst Agatha remained in it, he would not have granted her the merest trifle.

"'Must' is the only right word for a father where the life of his child is at stake," observed Agatha, pointedly.

"As you please; say what you will: I can have no objection."

"Then I repeat, I must have the opinion of some London physician as to what is the matter."

"If you please," again repeated the Colonel. "As many opinions as you like, only not whilst you are under my roof."

Agatha's eyes flashed fire. Margaret longed to interpose, but dared not. "You see, Margaret, how it is," exclaimed Agatha, appealing to her sister; "you can understand now the cruelty——"

"The folly!" interrupted the Colonel.

"The cruelty!" again repeated Agatha, in a louder tone. The Colonel rose from his seat, his face burning with indignation; but Agatha's tongue was the more nimble of the two, and she proceeded rapidly: "There is not another man in England who would refuse such a request. In England! no, not in the whole world!"

"Madam!" exclaimed the Colonel, in a voice of thunder. Agatha paused from actual physical nervousness. "Madam! do you know whom you are speaking of? I am your husband!" He walked up to her, and planted himself before her; but Agatha's weakness was only momentary.

'I know that I am speaking of a man destitute of every trace of human feeling," she said, with perfect calmness; and then, turning to Margaret, who stood by, trembling with agitation, she added: "You may tell my mother, Margaret, that if she has any commissions for London, I will execute them. I shall be there in a fortnight's time."

The Colonel shook with rage as he heard this speech. He hesitated, stammered, walked across the room, returned again, and at length uttered another portentous "Madam!" just as Agatha, after a provoking "Good night, Margaret, love,—kiss my father for me," escaped from his presence.

Margaret waited for an instant to consider what should be done. The Colonel, when in a passion, was not a man to be pacified by gentle words; and, deeming it best to leave him to himself, she went to her sister, to beg that the carriage might be ordered to take her home. Reasoning with Agatha was as useless as with Colonel Clive, and Margaret could not in conscience soothe her. She had in a great measure brought the storm upon herself. Agatha's pride was roused by Margaret's request. She had expected pity, though with the consciousness that she had behaved ill, and that Margaret must think so. A few cutting words were in consequence levelled at her, but Margaret bore them in silence. She went into the nursery to see the baby, and carry home the latest report of it, and then hurried to the carriage to reflect for the next quarter of an hour upon the blessings of a worldly, ill-assorted marriage.

CHAPTER LI.

Dr. Percival's illness was soon discovered to be of a more serious nature than had been anticipated, after he had first rallied from his alarming attack. He made little or no progress in strength, and it could not be concealed that his firmness of mind was much shaken. A short conversation upon business was sufficient to affect him injuriously for several hours; and yet to business he was now obliged to attend.

To extricate Craven from his difficulties—and no other alternative presented itself to the minds of his parents — would require nearly the whole of the sum which still remained of the accumulation of years of labour. Scarcely sufficient would be left to keep up the insurances; and if Dr. Percival were much longer to be incapacitated from exercising his profession, it would be necessary to raise money for the present needs of his family, even at the risk of eventually diminishing the provision which was made for them in case of his death. Such a prospect as this, even to a man in health, would be depressing, but in Dr. Percival's state it was overwhelming. The mind reacted upon the body, and day by day he grew weaker,—more nervous,—more averse to solitude,—more full of foreboding. Mrs. Percival's disposition was hopeful and she was too energetic to be easily frightened; she had faith in the fortunes of the family. They had gone on well for years, and why should they not continue to do so? Besides, there was the Colonel, their near connection, rolling in riches. A few thousands to him would be a mere nothing; and of course he would not see his father-in-law in difficulty without coming forward to help him.

Margaret saw the same facts, but did not arrive at the same conclusion. True, they had gone on well for years; but uninterrupted prosperity is not the natural course of human events. Faith in the fortunes of her family she had not, for there was nothing upon which faith could justly be grounded. They had lived for the world, and in the world they had had their reward; and if the evil day were now at hand, it was from the world alone that they could fairly seek assistance. And for Colonel Clive,—Margaret smiled, though it was a bitter smile, when she thought of depending upon him. Her great fear was lest her mother should apply to him directly: but Mrs. Percival had not been in the habit of interfering in money matters; and she went on hoping,

and prophesying that Dr. Percival would soon be well. "They must economise for a little while, and when he began his practice again, all would be right. A very few years, with such an income as his, would redeem the past." Margaret wished that Craven could only know all the unhappiness he had caused, for it might do him good.

"Don't wish him that, my dear," said her mother; "depend upon it he is miserable enough. Nothing could be more grateful than his letter this morning."

Margaret owned this, but it did not deter her from writing strongly. She did not regard Craven now as her elder brother. His breach of promise had placed him in a position of inferiority, and she described to him, as vividly as she was able, the present condition of the family, and the cloud that hung over the future. Craven's reply was more cheering to her than all her mother's prophecies. He said little, but that little was humble, and contained no fervent protestations of amendment. Fine words Margaret never could endure under any circumstances; and when penitence was to be shown, the expressions could scarcely be too concise to suit her taste. It was a monotonous life which Margaret was now leading,—every spare moment devoted to her father's sick room; but if "coming events" do, indeed, "cast their shadows before," it could not be a tranquil one. Hours of silence were no rest, solitude was no relief. If the pressure of family cares seemed from any circumstances to be for a time lessened, there was still the one never-ceasing subject to harass her. Dr. Percival now and then rallied for a day, and in consequence Mrs. Percival was in good spirits; and Mr. Sutherland wrote a better account of himself, and talked of soon returning,— a piece of information which, it seemed, must necessarily be delightful. But still Margaret seldom smiled. She looked thin and worn. Miss Debrett, who noticed it every time she saw her, imagined that she had too much nursing; or else, perhaps, she was fretting about the baby at Ashington; certainly it was not quite what it used to be, and it was very natural that its mother should be anxious; but she did not see why her dear Margaret should take it so much to heart. Poor little thing! if it were to go, it would be released from a world of much sorrow!

Margaret allowed that she was sometimes anxious about the child; but even there the evil lay deeper than the general eye could see. It was Margaret's fate to be behind the scenes in all domestic calamities; to gaze into the depths, whilst the eye of others rested only upon the surface. Agatha had been compelled,

notwithstanding her determination of spirit, to submit to her husband's will. Colonel Clive was not inclined to be fettered by family claims, and irritated by family annoyances during his stay in London. He liked to dine at his club, to indulge himself in the society of men of his own stamp; and to have been obliged to take charge of Agatha and the child would entirely have upset his plans. Agatha, indeed, professed that she intended to be absent only for a week; but the Colonel would not trust to this, and peremptorily insisted that the project should be abandoned.

"Mr. Harrison," he said, "had assured him there was nothing of any consequence amiss with the baby, and it was mere absurdity in Agatha to believe the contrary."

If the Colonel's conscience had been in the least susceptible, he would scarcely have asserted the last fact thus strongly. A few days after Margaret had dined at Ashington, Mr. Harrison's opinion underwent a change. He thought that there was not much the matter at that time, but he expressed some fears for the future; and though Agatha's anxiety magnified these distant fears into serious apprehensions, even Margaret saw that they had a foundation. The child pined away, and the indications of dawning intelligence which had delighted its mother's eye grew fainter. Agatha sometimes sat with it for hours in her lap, but there was no smile or movement; and then, again, apparently without cause, it would seem much better, almost as well as ever. In the midst of these alternations of hope and fear, Colonel Clive set off for London. It was a day of amendment, or Agatha would have been desperate. As it was, she taunted him with the threat that she would follow him; and the Colonel's parting words were—"Madam, you will do so at your peril." Margaret knew all this; she heard Agatha's lamentations, sometimes witnessed her agony of uneasiness, and yet she could not advise her sister to brave her husband's anger. The case did not seem of that nature to render it a matter of life and death, or even to make it absolutely necessary that a physician's opinion should be called in. Mrs. Percival often laughed at Agatha for being fanciful; and when the mother of eight children laughed, Margaret supposed it must be her own ignorance which made her see alarming symptoms.

Whether the child grew worse or better, however, the effect of her husband's conduct upon Agatha was most mischievous. Her passive aversion, or fretful irritability, was growing into burning indignation. His name was seldom mentioned to any one but Margaret, and to her it was accompanied by such marked contempt and hatred, that Margaret dreaded an allusion to it. It was no

marvel, then, that when Miss Debrett spoke of Ashington, or thought that Margaret was anxious, a sigh escaped her, which could never have been drawn forth by the prospect of the release of an innocent baby from the trials of an evil world.

CHAPTER LII.

Father Andrea waited silently, but not always contentedly, after his short interview with Margaret, in the hope of obtaining that acknowledgment of her difficulties which she had almost engaged to make; but he waited in vain. Margaret was too harassed by her home life to be able to devote the time which she would have deemed necessary for such an explanation, even if she had irrevocably determined upon making it. But the determination was now farther off than before. Mr. Sutherland was on his way home, and constantly as Margaret endeavoured to rouse her resolution to the point of a full confession to Father Andrea, so often did the image of her uncle, as of a guardian angel, rise up to check her. It was miserable to doubt, most miserable; it took from her every comfort in religion; it made her hasty and moody; it depressed her spirits by day, and broke her rest at night, until it sometimes seemed almost impossible to bear her present state of existence for another hour. But Father Andrea was in many ways a stranger, Mr. Sutherland was her near relation and true friend; and though Margaret again said to herself, that her uncle's arguments were not likely to satisfy her, that perhaps she might even do wrong in listening to them, still she dreaded his knowing, that with the prospect of so soon seeing him, she had applied for advice to another person, and that other a Romish priest. The visits to Henningsley were now rare and painful. The Countess was naturally eager to discover the advance which Margaret was making in religious opinions, and Margaret was as naturally unwilling to confess her indecision. This caused a restraint, of which Beatrice often complained, and it was more injurious to the harmony of their friendship than Margaret at all supposed. Having given her affection to the Countess, she gave it unreservedly; and having trusted her, she trusted fully. But Beatrice sought for the devotion of every thought, and a confidence which should have no reserve; and when she did not obtain it, she supposed that the affection must necessarily be imperfect. To add

to her annoyance, there was the dread lest Margaret should be wanting in stability of character, and this doubt was even more constantly presenting itself to the Countess, though she tried to turn away from it.

"We shall lose her, father, after all," she said, one day to the confessor, after they had been conversing together upon the subject of Margaret's delay. "Her Protestant friends will take alarm, and our efforts will be ineffectual."

Father Andrea did not reject the idea. He also was evidently disconcerted; but he endeavoured to soothe the Countess by some general observations upon the Wisdom which ordains that we should not succeed too easily in attaining wishes upon which our hearts are fondly fixed. The Countess saw in the remarks an accordance with her own fears, and answered:—

"You are doubtless right, father, with regard to earthly wishes: but ours are higher; and you must let me say, that your regret cannot be like mine."

"Perhaps it is not, my daughter; yet I am open to disappointment, great disappointment."

"And you are disappointed, then?" inquired the Countess.

The confessor was sorry that he had allowed the expression to escape him. It gave a reality to the doubts which Beatrice had not before openly allowed herself to mention.

"We are not justified in expecting perfection, my daughter," he said; "and if we do, disappointment is our proper punishment."

"But Margaret! Margaret to be weak!" exclaimed the Countess, bitterly.

"We must not condemn her hastily," replied the confessor; "and especially we must not think that our will is to be supreme."

"Or rather, I must not think so," said Beatrice, with a smile which had in it more of sadness than of amusement at having read his meaning.

"I speak of myself, also, my daughter. We must learn to bear with the infirmities of our fellow-creatures in consideration of our own."

Beatrice turned away without answering. Father Andrea watched her for a few moments, expecting that she would renew the conversation; but he was mistaken. The Countess left him hastily, and almost immediately afterwards he saw her walking in front of the windows with a disturbed step, and seemingly regardless of the keen east wind which was blowing. The confessor's attention under other circumstances might have been directed to the danger to her health, but now his thoughts were

given to a different subject — the almost impossibility of entirely uprooting the distinctive characteristics with which all are born. After years of toil and prayer, both in himself and in the Countess, the same spirit of visionary enthusiasm and exacting pride were to be traced, which had in childhood required such a continual check. A prayer rose to his lips that she might be chastened and directed by a wiser hand than his, and then he returned to his study, without remembering that it was desirable again to seek the Countess and caution her against the inclement weather to which she was exposing herself. The caution would, however, probably have been useless. There was a tumult of anger and vexation in the Countess's breast which must have steeled her against any such warnings, even from Father Andrea. Those few minutes had given vent to a feeling which had for weeks at intervals been gaining strength. If she had been Margaret, if she had loved as Margaret professed to love, and if she had heard the arguments which from time to time had been brought forward in support of the Roman Catholic Church, she was convinced that her whole heart would have turned to it. The religion of her dearest friend, when upheld by such a man as Father Andrea, would have demanded the most searching inquiry. The Countess did not wish Margaret to own herself convinced, but she did expect that she would seek after knowledge; and instead, Margaret appeared lukewarm and uncertain. When at Henningsley, she was often abstracted in manner; and if the subject of religion were introduced, she would sometimes entreat in anguish that it might be dropped. Could the cause be fear? a dread of confessing herself a convert to the truth? Beatrice shrank from the thought, as though a serpent had stung her. Her doubt of Margaret took another form yet not less fatal to her happiness. She had entreated her to consult Father Andrea; but in vain. The will which was a law to all others had no power over the friend she loved. The Countess believed it was her affection which was hurt; but it was her pride also. Yet with the confessor's warning still fresh in her recollection, in the spirit of the petted, spoilt child, which she had been in her early days, Beatrice took no heed of the duty of self-examination, but dwelt still upon what she believed to be Margaret's weakness.

> "To be wroth with one we love
> Doth work like madness in the brain."

Beatrice was not "wroth," but she was annoyed and suspicious. For nearly half an hour she walked to and fro on the terrace,

whilst unjust fancies and chimerical ideas crowded into her mind, to be rejected sometimes as wrong and absurd, at others to be retained with the wretched power of self-tormenting, which wounded affection or esteem so peculiarly possesses. The sharp piercing wind was felt by her, but not regarded; in her present excited temperament it was a refreshment rather than not. She was suddenly stopped, however, by a remonstrating voice. Lucia appeared at the other end of the garden. She had been with Mrs. St. Aubyn for a drive, and was just returned. The presence of the young Italian had seldom been more unwelcome to the Countess, and she did not at first take any notice of the expressions of rather exaggerated horror at her imprudence in venturing out on such a day. Lucia, however, was not to be baffled. She came up, breathless with haste, and began an eager entreaty that the Countess would instantly go in. Beatrice smiled, though slightly, and professing to have no idea that the wind could do her harm, continued leaning over the balustrade. Lucia had lately seen several of these moods, and sometimes repaid them in the same way; but now her real anxiety overcame any petty annoyance, and she exclaimed:—

"Then walk, pray walk, Signora, if you will not listen to me in anything else. It must be very bad for you to be standing still."

"It cannot signify," said the Countess, abruptly; yet she obeyed Lucia's bidding, and moved on.

Lucia followed, and nothing was said for some moments. It was a hateful silence to Lucia, for she believed that the Countess must be thinking of Margaret.

"Where did Mrs. St. Aubyn take you?" inquired Beatrice at length, forcing herself to say something to her companion.

"Merely into the town, and to Ashington. She wished to inquire for Mrs. Clive's baby."

"Is it ill?"

"More than ill; they fear that it will not outlive the night."

The Countess was much shocked. She was naturally too unselfish to be in any case engrossed with herself, when made acquainted with the sorrows of others. "Poor Mrs. Clive!" she said; and then, in a lower tone, she added—"and Margaret loved it so much!"

"Miss Percival was just driving up as we came away," said Lucia. "She was looking ill."

The Countess was sorry, but not surprised to hear it. In Margaret's present state of mind, she knew that suffering was unavoidable.

"Mrs. St. Aubyn says that she hopes to see Miss Percival more cheerful soon," continued Lucia. "She is expecting an uncle home, whom she is very fond of."

"An uncle! what uncle?" inquired the Countess quickly.

"Oh, Signora, how strange! Surely you know. He is a clergyman."

"Yes, I remember. I have heard."

But Beatrice could not know much, for Margaret had said almost as little of Mr. Sutherland to her, as she had of the Countess to Mr. Sutherland.

"He is to be in England very soon indeed, I believe," said Lucia. "But, Signora, I should have imagined that you were better acquainted with this than any one."

She glanced inquiringly at the Countess, who did not perceive the rather sarcastic expression. Her thoughts were differently directed. Margaret expecting her uncle! then no marvel that she refused to apply to Father Andrea. But why had she not said so? why had she gone on raising false expectations? There was a disingenuousness in such conduct which Beatrice could little brook at any time, still less, in her present humour.

"Miss Percival's uncle, Mr. Sutherland, will find much alteration since he went away," observed Lucia, determined to pursue the subject till she could discover to what degree the Countess was interested in the family, as well as in Margaret. "Mrs. St. Aubyn says that Dr. Percival is really seriously ill: she does not know whether they are aware of it, but Mr. Harrison thinks badly of him; and Mrs. Clive is half frantic about her baby; and if anything were to happen to Dr. Percival, Mrs. St. Aubyn fears it will be very bad for the family. The son in the army has been frightfully extravagant, and there are a great many to be provided for."

This was rather a medley of misfortunes, according to Lucia's usual habit of mixing up all she heard, and detailing it without an attempt at order; but it was sufficient to give the Countess a sad impression of Margaret's causes for unhappiness, and of her own unkindness.

"And Margaret was looking ill?" she asked, betraying the current of her own thoughts rather than replying to Lucia.

"Yes, Mrs. St. Aubyn declares she never knew any one so changed. It must be a miserable thing to belong to such a family."

Beatrice walked forward rapidly a few steps, as if trying to control her indignation; then, turning round quietly, she said:

"Lucia, that is an observation which I have before requested may not be made in my presence."

"As you please, Signora;" but Lucia's knitted brow showed that the reproof did not please her. "I can have but one wish in ever mentioning the name of Percival."

"Not to give me pleasure," said the Countess.

"To give you truth, Signora; — a truth which you will never learn whilst living as you now do."

"Lucia," replied Beatrice, with great composure, "you forget the respect which is due to me and to my friends; I advise you to recollect yourself for the future."

"Recollect!" — the flashing eyes of the Italian girl kindled with indignation, and, with an eager gesticulation, she added, "Signora, there is no need to bid me recollect. I have, of late, sufficiently learnt to remember my state of dependence."

"The lesson has not been taught you willingly on my part, Lucia," replied the Countess: "I desire only your good, and I would have made you happy as my younger sister if you had consented to it; — but you have marred your own peace — and mine."

"Yours! — yours! — Signora! Say it — no, you cannot say it," exclaimed Lucia, impetuously; "you, the queen, the idol, the worshipped ——"

"To be worshipped is not happiness, Lucia," replied Beatrice.

"But to be loved is," said Lucia, in a tone of wretchedness, — "and would that I had never known it!"

The Countess paused at the hall door.

"I am not going to continue this conversation, Lucia," she said; "it is undesirable for us both. If you have complaints to make of my conduct, let them be communicated to Father Andrea, and immediately: he leaves us to-morrow for London, and I wish to have no recurrence of this language in his absence."

Lucia stood for an instant, motionless; but as the Countess was about to enter the house she caught her dress. "One moment," she said, in a voice not one accent of which faltered, although it was strained and hollow: — "Signora, I have marred your peace. It matters not whether your words were true, — you have said it. I will go — back." The veins in her forehead swelled with intensity of agitation, and with repressed bitterness breaking forth, she added, vehemently, "and leave you to the love of an English heretic!"

The Countess would have detained her; but she was gone. Her light step was scarcely heard as she rushed up the broad

staircase, and in a moment she had passed along the gallery, and the quick closing of a door echoed loudly and drearily through the almost deserted mansion.

CHAPTER LIII.

Lucia had reason for saying that Margaret was looking ill. The last night had been a night of watchfulness by Dr. Percival's sick bed, and, after a few hours of unrefreshing sleep, she had risen to the duties of the day, miserable, anxious, and irritable. For Margaret could not now calm her troubled spirit by prayer; she could not now kneel before a Father's throne, and find rest in the consciousness of His presence; she could not turn from the din and tumult, and care of life, to the peacefulness of that eternal home where "the wicked cease from troubling, and where the weary are at rest." Perplexity, controversy, followed her in her hours of devotion, and the petition which rose to her lips too often wandered off into speculative doubts as to doctrine, or questions of casuistry as to conduct. Then came the business of the day, upon such a state of mind, — so unprepared, — so unchastened; and Margaret's temper gave way under the trial; her manner became capricious, her words were hasty, and her decisions often ill-judged and unjust. No one could be more sensible of this change than Margaret herself, and no one could be less willing to excuse it. She blamed herself, resolved, often tried sincerely, but the faults were repeated. No longer able to govern herself, she looked round for some other guide. Increased self-denial she fancied might be of service; and Margaret gave up her usual gratifications, and cut short even her ordinary recreations; but her mind grew more bewildered, more excitable. The remedies themselves proved a snare to her; for they were self-imposed, and sometimes neglected, and often seen to be of doubtful efficacy. The Countess and Father Andrea were now constantly in her mind, and the sense of personal infirmity was a greater temptation to be unreserved with the latter than any speculative doubts. For in the Romish Church (she said to herself) some one would always be at hand to aid her in her difficulties. Confession would be her rest and refuge, and absolution would restore the peace which was lost. And in such a case as hers, the assistance of another and a wiser counsellor was undoubtedly needed. But if Margaret had made herself thoroughly acquainted with her

Prayer Book, she would not have been so hasty in casting reflections upon the Church into which she was baptized, under the idea that needs like hers had been overlooked, and left without provision. She would have found in the first exhortation in the Communion Service a direction given to those who have griefs to be opened, and consciences to be quieted, and scruples and doubtfulness to be avoided, to apply to the minister of their parish, or to some other clergyman, that they "may receive the benefit of absolution, together with ghostly counsel and advice;" and whatever might be the difficulties in the way of others from the obstacles interposed by long neglect of the practice, in her own case both the duty and the opportunity of following the direction of the Church were clear. She might naturally have been averse from applying to Mr. Stanley, fearing to find no sympathy, and distrusting his judgment; but in her uncle a guide had been given her to whom she might have recourse without hesitation. Yet Margaret voluntarily turned away from him, and was in her heart seeking for another in a foreign communion. It may be doubted also whether she would have been contented with the use of confession, as encouraged and recommended by the English Church. What she required, or fancied she required, was, besides minute instructions in the conduct of daily life, a constantly repeated assurance of forgiveness which should completely remove the burden of self-reproach.

Margaret might have learnt a lesson upon this subject from her own conduct with the children. On this morning, before leaving her room, it occurred to her that she had forgotten on the previous evening to examine Harriet's book of confessions. This was always required; for Harriet's tender conscience could not rest in self-examination, without that which stood to her in lieu of absolution — Margaret's inspection and knowledge. She always entreated that her sister would look at her book; and if it seemed likely that the request would be forgotten, wrote it on a slip of paper, that Margaret might see it when she went to her room. Margaret was pleased with this at first, for it was candid and simple-minded, and gave her, she thought, an insight into the child's mind; but lately she had begun to doubt. She opened the book now, and read, "Wasted my time before school — left my books about — was cross to Grace — did not try to practise properly;" and other faults of the same kind; trifling, but likely to grow into bad habits. Margaret turned back a few pages, and read the same again and again; yet some nights before she had had a long conversation with Harriet, and urged her to

be more careful, and had even brought tears of penitence. How was it that the goodness evaporated so quickly. Margaret went down stairs, having made a strict resolution to be patient, and found Harriet alone in the school-room. Grace and Philip had learnt their lessons, and were gone into the garden to play. Harriet was not quite perfect in hers, and remained to look at them. Margaret asked, rather angrily, "How this could be? She had had sufficient time. It was evident that she had been wasting it." Harriet was humble and silent, and Margaret continued: "I hoped, Harriet, that you would have improved before this. You told me the other night that you were very sorry."

"And I was sorry," said Harriet, earnestly; "but I forget."

"My dear child," replied Margaret, striving not to show any irritability, "is that an excuse? Do you not think I must be very much vexed to find that you are as inattentive as ever? I wonder whether you ever look over the book you write in at night, and see how long the same faults have been going on."

"You see it, don't you?" asked Harriet, quickly.

"Yes; but what good can that be? They are your faults, not mine."

"And won't you forgive them?" said Harriet.

"Yes, of course I will, when you are really sorry, and try to do better; but to tell me of them is of no use without that."

"Then you don't really forgive?" said Harriet, in an anxious tone; "I always thought you did."

Margaret was perplexed for a reply. The pardon must necessarily be conditional; but this would not satisfy the child. "My forgiveness is not the important thing," she said, gravely. "If you were quite sure of it, you ought not to be satisfied, unless you could hope that God would forgive you likewise."

"But when you are not angry, then I think that God is not," said Harriet, whilst her manner grew more reverent.

"And that is the reason you like me to look at your book?"

"Yes, and you are never cross."

"I could not be cross, as you call it, when you come to me to confess your faults; but if, because you confess, you think you may forget, and go away happy, the confession will do you more harm than good. We will try now, without my looking. You shall write down your faults still, but I will not see them. Whose forgiveness then must you seek?"

"God's," replied Harriet, in a tone which showed awe and some distress of mind.

"And He will know whether you are in earnest, and exactly

how much you endeavour to improve," continued Margaret. "We cannot deceive Him."

"I did not mean to deceive you," said Harriet, with something of reproach in her voice.

"I am quite sure that you did not, my love; but you deceived yourself. The reason you liked me to see your book was, not that I might help you to overcome your faults, because if that had been the motive you would have tried a great deal more by yourself; but you disliked having them upon your mind."

"Then you will never know anything," said Harriet.

"Yes, indeed, my dear; whatever you wish to tell me at any time; but not regularly. You know I always like to listen to you, and all that I want is for you to try and please God, and think of Him more than of me. I may die, or go away; a great many things may happen to prevent me from being with you, but still you will be bound to love and serve Him."

Harriet became very thoughtful, and Margaret saw that the thoughtfulness continued. She was sorry that she had in any way laid a burden upon the child's mind, but she had little doubt of having acted wisely. However advisable it might be to win her confidence, it would not do to sacrifice the principle of personal responsibility to God. Margaret followed unconsciously the system of the English Church; but in her own case she preferred the practice of Rome. Priestly absolution, where the conscience is charged with some particular offence, was not all that she needed. She wished to escape from herself, and after receiving pardon for the past, she would have thrown herself entirely under the direction of another person. Margaret desired to rid herself of the burden, and the conflict which God has imposed upon every human being; but could she in fact be justified in putting aside her own judgment and conscience? She might act by the advice of a confessor; yet if her actions were unwise, she would surely suffer from them; and if they were sinful, she would surely be punished for them. Reason told her this; but reason was not listened to. In her state of wretchedness, Margaret was ruled by feeling, and this led her at last to determine upon applying to Father Andrea without farther delay. With regard to confession and absolution, Mr. Sutherland she knew would not give her what she required. He would probably advise her as to her conduct, and warn her to receive with greater faith the absolution pronounced by the Church in the service of the Holy Communion. He might even allow that the practice of confession was, under limitation, very desirable. She had often heard him say this; but he was not likely to allow

her to put herself entirely into his hands. Margaret did not see any analogy between her own feelings and those of her little sister; in fact she was too unhappy to think about it; and after a fretful morning in the school-room, miserable at having broken her sincere resolutions, she at length decided upon beginning the letter which was to explain some of her principal difficulties to Father Andrea. By this means she should at least be fully satisfied as to the claims of a Church which promised all the assistance she desired in her daily conduct.

Thus at the precise time when the Countess Novera was judging hardly of an appatent hesitation and lukewarmness, Margaret's mind was brought to that very point which Beatrice most desired. The step was one involving consequences of too great importance to enable Margaret to meet with composure any one connected with Henningsley; and her agitation was but ill-concealed when she passed Lucia and Mrs. St. Aubyn at the lodge-gate at Ashington.

Once, however, within the house, her thoughts were quite diverted from herself. The baby had been taken worse, Agatha was hopeless, servants were rushing in all directions, for they scarcely knew what; Mr. Harrison had been called in, but still persisted that there was no "immediate" danger. Agatha languidly repeated the word "immediate," and fell back almost fainting. Margaret roused her utmost energy for the occasion; but it was not what it used to be,—the support which she once could have found in religion was gone. She endeavoured a little to console Agatha; but what she said was mechanical, and she soon relapsed into silence. Mrs. Percival was sent for, and came directly, and Margaret was then obliged to return to her father. She would fain have remained; but her presence could not be as useful as her mother's, and Agatha did not press it. She did not indeed press anything. Her eyes were vacant, and she moved slowly, as if in a stupor. Margaret kissed her at parting; but the kiss was not returned. Agatha had no thought now but of her dying child. It was dying, notwithstanding the hopeful prophecies that it would recover. Margaret looked upon the unconscious infant as it lay in its nurse's arms, and felt assured that she was gazing upon it living, for the last time. Her tears fell upon the soft pallid little cheek; but they were not tears of regret,—rather, they were tears of envy for the prospect of its early happiness.

Late at night Mrs. Percival returned from Ashington. The child had been sleeping, and Agatha had acknowledged a ray of hope, and consented to be left. Margaret saw that her mother was worn out with fatigue, and insisted upon her taking rest.

"She herself would lie down on the sofa in her father's room," she said, "in case anything might be wanted."

Mrs. Percival agreed, and Margaret lay down in the hope of sleeping. But sleep did not come at her bidding. Her father was still, and apparently comfortable; there was not a sound to be heard; nothing to disturb or outwardly to distress her; but the long hours of the night seemed as if they would never end, whilst Margaret tossed from side to side, and mentally from care to care, without one resting-place for her doubting, distracting thoughts. The morning dawned, and Margaret rose, and looked out of the window towards Henningsley. The hill above the house could just be seen to the left, and her eye rested upon it fondly but sadly. She was experiencing now what her uncle had once warned her would be the case in an unequal friendship. The Countess was not unacquainted with her trials, but, moving in a different sphere, she could not really understand and participate in them. The thought added to her desolateness, but it did not diminish her affection; it seemed rather to elevate it. Beatrice appeared a being removed from the common accidents of mortality, and Margaret's love became more a species of adoration, as the present circumstances of her life seemed to raise a barrier between them. For a passing moment an often-indulged vision of happiness again came before her. To live with the Countess, to be her solace and companion, to be one with her in faith as well as in feeling,—it seemed that this would be Paradise upon earth. But a rumbling sound struck upon Margaret's ear. That slight noise recalled her imagination to her true situation, to the struggle which lay before her, let the affairs of her family, or her own final convictions in religion, be what they might.

It was the rattle of carriage wheels which had attracted Margaret's notice. She thought it unusual at that early hour, and remained at the window to watch what might be going by. As the carriage turned a corner of the road, Margaret saw that it was Colonel Clive's. She stood still, but her limbs trembled. She was certain that sorrow was at hand. The carriage stopped at the gate without driving up to the house. Margaret thought of her father and mother, and feared they would be disturbed. She determined to go herself and unbar the door, for it was so early that none of the servants were stirring. With a noiseless footstep she stole from the room. The heavy locks and bolts were almost beyond her strength, and the peal of the bell had summoned the household before the door could be opened. Margaret threw it back, expecting to see a servant and receive a message. Agatha

was there, ghastly pale, with her dress disordered, her hair hanging carelessly about her face. She returned no answer to Margaret's hurried questions, but made her way into the hall.

"For pity's sake speak, Agatha," said Margaret. Still there was no reply. Agatha ascended the staircase, and Margaret followed. There was an expression in Agatha's countenance which made the blood curdle in her veins. With even steps Agatha proceeded along the passage to the door of her own chamber, the room which for so many years she had occupied peacefully and happily. Then pausing, she said in a voice awfully calm, whilst she fixed her unnaturally bright eye upon her sister, "Margaret, I am come home.—I have no child."

A cry of anguish escaped from Margaret's lips; but the unhappy mother stood by without shedding a tear, whilst the words "home—I am come home"—were uttered again, as if unconsciously. Margaret yielded to her own sorrow but for a moment. She threw her arm round her sister's neck, and said, "Agatha, dearest, it cannot suffer now."

Agatha's eye wandered vacantly round the room.

"We will return together," continued Margaret, and she gently tried to lead her away; but Agatha resisted the endeavour. She stood fixed in the centre of the room, her countenance becoming more and more rigid. Margaret trembled. That still, stern face of beauty seemed full of horror. "Agatha," she said, assuming a tone of command, "it is your duty to return. It is the will of God that your child should die."

They were words of seeming severity, but they startled Agatha from her trance. She staggered across the room, exclaiming, "It is his doing—he murdered it," and sank senseless upon the bed.

CHAPTER LIV.

Two miserable days followed that terrible morning. At the expiration of them, Agatha stood by the side of her child's coffin, and wept most bitter tears; but Margaret trusted that they were blest, for they were the tears of nature. She could however little hope that things would again return to their natural course, for there was one subject which Agatha would not suffer to be approached. Colonel Clive was expected at Ashington, and his wife would not remain to meet him. Mrs. Percival, shocked at the discovery which

she now made of the state of feeling between her daughter and her husband, was inclined to follow the dictates of an indulgent partiality, and urged that Agatha might return to the Grove for the present, and trust to time and mild arguments to restore unanimity. Dr. Percival was too ill to be consulted, for everything which excited his mind increased his fever. Margaret's judgment therefore was alone to be depended upon; but though it was reasonable and unwavering, it was without effect. It was in vain that she spoke of the sin of overlooking a wife's promise and duty; of the consideration due to a father's feelings; of the censure of the world, and the almost certainty that if, at such a moment, the breach were widened, it could never again be repaired. Agatha was, as she always had been, invulnerable to reason when her will was determined. "She would not be dependent upon a mother's kindness," she said, "if that mother were unwilling to receive her. She would retire to a lodging in Staunton, Deering, Eastlake, anywhere, the whole world was now alike; but she would not meet the man whose barbarity had caused the death of his child."

Margaret's heart revolted from such a step. Before the marriage, she would thankfully have made the sacrifice of her dearest personal interests to save her sister from a life of wretchedness; now, she would as thankfully have made an equal sacrifice to induce her to submit to the fate which was the result of her own deliberate act. Yet when Agatha persisted in her resolution, only one course could be adopted. The shelter of her father's house could alone give a pretext for such conduct, and Margaret found a slight satisfaction in the hope that distress of mind might by the world be considered a plausible excuse, and that before long the inveteracy of her sister's feelings might be subdued.

The world, however, is in such cases peculiarly clear-sighted; and even were it not so, Colonel Clive was not a man to conceal his wrongs. He returned to his home shocked, if not very much grieved, at the loss of his child; and his sentiments towards Agatha softened by discovering that her anxiety had not been really unfounded. If, at any period since the first disagreement, it would have been possible to produce a cordial feeling on his side, this was the one. But he found his house deserted, his servants looking mysterious, and no voice of kindness to mitigate the self-reproach, which, notwithstanding his long habits of indulgence, pressed upon his conscience. Margaret had entreated that a note at least might be left for him, explaining that Agatha

had gone to her father's house only during the first paroxysm of grief, and leaving an opening for a return, if the Colonel expressed any wish to see her; but Agatha could perceive no good, she said, in such half measures: return to him she never would, and why then should she hold out any hopes? The causes of Margaret's distress were incomprehensible both to her sister and Mrs. Percival. The latter, indeed, thought it very dreadful that the Colonel should have so deceived them as to his character, and grieved sorely over the inevitable loss of position which must be the consequence of any real separation; but the case was not an uncommon one; the Colonel would be bound in honour to make Agatha a handsome allowance; and, if they were not happy together, he doubtless would do so for the sake of peace. Margaret was not open to any considerations of this nature. Agatha's action was in her eyes sinful: as such there could be consolation only in repentance and amendment; and when she heard that both the Colonel and Mrs. St. Aubyn had expressed their indignation not only at Agatha, but her whole family, she felt humiliation, but no bitterness in return. The true state of the affair was kept from Dr. Percival as much as possible; but he soon suspected that something was very much amiss. His questions and surmises were peculiarly harassing to Margaret, and she would willingly have told him everything, and begged for his interference, or at least advice; but Mrs. Percival would not hear of it. The reason she gave was, that it would excite him too much; but the real reason, though unacknowledged, was the dread of his displeasure. Dr. Percival was a straightforward, punctilious,—his wife called him, a crotchety man. He had strong ideas of the duty of a wife's submission, and would have been pained beyond expression at the strictures which justly might be passed upon Agatha's conduct. As long as the truth could be kept from him Mrs. Percival determined that it should be. Agatha was naturally cautious, and in her short interviews with her father, took care to speak of her stay merely as temporary. Margaret avoided the subject as much as possible, and Mrs. Percival, whenever it was alluded to, purposely wandered off into lamentations over the shock which Agatha had received, and the necessity of a mother's eye to watch over her health.

Miss Debrett was the person whom Mrs. Percival most dreaded. To her simple mind it was perfectly unaccountable, that at a season of such family distress the Colonel and dear Agatha should choose to be apart. If Agatha were really ill, and of that there was no doubt, it was very right that she should be under her mother's

roof; but then, why was not the Colonel there too? Why was it that every one at the Grove looked so awkward when his name was mentioned? Why was Mrs. St. Aubyn's carriage never seen at the gate? What could it all mean? Miss Debrett was a yet more frequent visitor at the Grove now that Dr. Percival was ill. She made it a point of duty to know every day exactly how he had slept, and now and then she was admitted to see him. She was no companion, but she contrived to amuse him for a little while; and in pain and weakness, and great mental anxiety, even a momentary diversion of the thoughts is a blessing. "Your father and I were putting our heads together, yesterday, my dear," she said one morning to Margaret, "to find out what is the matter with Mrs. St. Aubyn. Your father says she has not been once to inquire after him for several days, and she used to send regularly, I know; I watched the servant go by my window exactly at eleven o'clock."

Margaret would fain have professed ignorance; but this her conscience did not allow; and she answered, "that Mrs. St. Aubyn often took fancies in her head."

"But such a strange one this, my love, so entirely unaccountable! And people talk so much about it."

"Do they?" inquired Margaret, with some anxiety.

"Yes, indeed they do. It was only yesterday I met Mr. Stanley, and he asked me what was the cause of the coolness, and whether it was true about the Colonel and Agatha."

"True! what?" asked Margaret.

Miss Debrett's eye was more penetrating than usual, for it was quickened by affection. "My dear," she said, "I suspect there is nothing new to you in what people say. I wish there might be."

"But you have not told me what you have heard," replied Margaret, wishing to avoid the conversation, and at the same time desirous to learn the state of public opinion.

"As to that," replied Miss Debrett, "I have been thinking of it a great deal; and I came over here hoping I should have a nice little quiet chat with your father about it; but Symonds tells me he is not so well, poor man!"

"He had a very disturbed night," replied Margaret, "and I don't think he will be equal to talking to you to-day."

"I am so very sorry, my dear. What does Mr. Harrison say."

"He tells us he must be kept quite quiet," replied Margaret; "and that is difficult."

"Yes, to be sure! with all his patients wishing to see him, and

no doubt coming to ask after him. But I have heard that Dr. Hastings of Eastlake is going to settle in Staunton, and I dare say he will help a little till your father is well enough to be about again."

Margaret had heard the same intelligence, and had drawn an unpleasant conclusion from it. It was to her a symptom of the near approach of the storm which was gathering over the family. A few months ago the idea of a new physician settling in Staunton would have been almost ludicrous.

"Well, they are hard times!" sighed Miss Debrett. "I should very much have enjoyed a gossip with your poor father this morning; but since it can't be, you must tell me instead. Just sit down quietly for a minute, if you can, and let me know a little about it."

Margaret excused herself from sitting down, on the plea of being wanted by the children, and proposed that Miss Debrett should wait to see her mother. But Miss Debrett's strong point was curiosity, and upon the eve of its being satisfied, she did not like the notion of delay.

"Only one minute, my love," she said. "It seems strange, you know, for me to be the only person ignorant, intimate as I am with you all; and that young Italian girl with Mrs. St. Aubyn knowing everything, I am certain."

Margaret suffered under a mixed feeling. Her pride was hurt at the notion of her family affairs being made the subject of general conversation, and Lucia was too nearly connected with the Countess Novera, to allow any opinion, which she might form, to be a matter of indifference.

"What do you mean," she said, "by thinking that Lucia Fontana knows everything?"

"Why, my dear, only this; that Mrs. St. Aubyn and that young lady, I never remember her name, called on me yesterday, and somehow, one never can tell how those things happen, we began talking about all of you, and I could not help remarking that the Italian girl was quite alive the moment your name was mentioned."

"But who spoke of us first?" inquired Margaret.

"Why I did, my dear. I meant nothing wrong; and you know it was natural, being fond of you all, that I should talk about you. But Mrs. St. Aubyn drew up very stately, and said something about a painful subject, and dreadful disappointment, and her poor brother, and looked at the Italian girl just as if she was her intimate friend; and then she drew up too, and sighed. I hope

there was no harm in it; but I thought, at the time, it seemed strange for such a young thing to sigh about the concerns of strangers. Mrs. St. Aubyn and she got up directly, in a great hurry, and said they must go.—But Margaret, my love, you seem to take it quite to heart."

Margaret did not know that she had shown it, but she did feel mentally very uncomfortable. The Countess must hear everything from Lucia, whilst she had been almost silent. Not that Margaret had not thought of, and written to Beatrice. Every hour, as it went by, brought some recollection of the friend she best loved, and each day had been brightened by the hope of meeting; and when that was found to be impracticable, the disappointment was softened, as much as it could be, by notes. Margaret wrote of herself more confidentially and freely, for she had acknowledged her intention of seeking an explanation with Father Andrea, as soon as he should return from London, where he had been absent some little time. Religion was now the chief topic of their communications. Margaret even sought to forestall Father Andrea's advice, and frequently, in the few hasty lines which were all for which she could find leisure, sent a query of difficulty, to which Beatrice was to reply herself. Of the private anxieties of the family she said as little as possible; for pecuniary difficulties she knew ought to be kept secret until the last moment, and Agatha's conduct would be as repugnant to the Countess's principles as to her own. If it could be concealed, and a re-union affected, Margaret felt that much humiliation would be spared her; but in this short conversation with Miss Debrett, her hope upon this point was destroyed. Lucia Fontana, as the confidante of Mrs. St. Aubyn, would hear all the particulars, exaggerated by personal resentment. The Countess would know, not merely that differences existed between Agatha and Colonel Clive, but that the former had actually left her husband's roof at the moment when every sentiment of duty ought to have induced her to remain; and that she was now domesticated with her own family, leaving the Colonel to the desolate solitude of his childless home.

Margaret herself could make excuses for Agatha, knowing what she had suffered; but it was not likely that the Countess would; and how would she interpret the silence which had been observed upon the subject? Margaret blamed herself for short-sightedness. She might have known from the beginning that such a step as Agatha had taken must excite public observation, and she ought to have anticipated any false reports

affection of Beatrice, it seemed as if Margaret's last hope of happiness would be gone. With the comfort of her home broken up; the prospect of her father's increasing illness,—perhaps his death; the idea of the privation, even poverty, which might follow; the doubts which took from her all consolation in religion; and the dread of the pain she must inflict upon her parents and her uncle, by acknowledging the state of her mind,—her cup of sorrow seemed well nigh full.

The one overflowing drop which alone remained to be added, was a misunderstanding between herself and the Countess. Margaret scarcely knew before this moment how dearly she loved Beatrice. Whilst all was bright and smooth, she had suffered her affections to rest upon an earthly friend, and had seldom seriously questioned whether the heart which was given to her was in any way diverted from God. It had at first appeared to be the thirst for truth, which caused her to listen so eagerly whilst Beatrice, in fervent impassioned language, spoke of the comforts provided by her religion; but had the same words been uttered by another voice, they would have been comparatively without power. Even Father Andrea's remarks were received with indifference, when Beatrice was present. Margaret could reason upon them, and sometimes doubt if they were convincing; but when Beatrice spoke her reason was silenced. The brilliant smile,—the eloquent glance of the eye,—the gentle caress,—were all that was needed to induce her to give, at least for the time, an assent to whatever principle might be brought forward, although she would not openly acknowledge it. Margaret loved Beatrice more than she loved truth, and having now a dread that a change might be about to pass over the "spirit of her dream," she perceived how entirely her affections had been withdrawn from all other objects to centre upon this one. The thought could not be unmixed with fear. She had loved the Countess, it might be, too well. She had loved where she had been warned of danger—where there was no mutual basis of religious faith. Was it certain that the blessing of God rested upon their friendship? Yet without it, how could it be expected to stand?

CHAPTER LV.

The Countess Novera was in the enjoyment of brighter hopes. The transient distrust which had clouded her happiness in Margaret's society had, she believed, passed away never to return.

Margaret's avowed intention of applying to Father Andrea, and the questions which she had already begun to ask regarding some of the doctrines of the Church of Rome, were so many reproaches for ever having thought her timid or lukewarm. She was now looking forward to the return of the confessor, in the full persuasion that after a little more personal intercourse with him, Margaret's mind would be settled. And then—the Countess was neither selfish nor cold-hearted, but it had undoubtedly happened most opportunely for her imaginative happiness that Lucia Fontana should, just at this time, have expressed a decided wish to return to her own country.

The absence of the young Italian would free Beatrice from all restraint, and leave her at liberty, if persecution were the result of Margaret's change of faith, to offer her an asylum either in England or in Italy. The latter had of late been the country most frequently in the Countess's thoughts. Since the day when she imprudently braved the north-east wind, the spasm in her side had become a fixed aching pain; and the trifling cough, which before she called nothing, now often served to break her rest for hours at night. Beatrice was blessed with a buoyant disposition, but she could not be blind to these symptoms. They showed that an English climate was not good for her. But in either case,—England or Italy,—she was hopeful that Margaret would ultimately be her friend for life; a friend in the fullest sense of the word; one united with her in the most sacred and enduring attachment, and upon whom she might lavish all her affection and generosity with no vow to form a limit to her desires.

Lucia's determination, first expressed in a moment of pique, was persisted in because she was indignant at finding that the Countess did not resent it. Poor Lucia! she had full cause now for jealousy, and jealousy is, of all passions, that which makes us inflict the most torment on ourselves. After volunteering to go away, she shut herself up, refusing to eat, refusing to see any one, insisting even upon not being disturbed by Father Andrea. The next day she appeared as usual, and complained of illness. The Countess overlooked her waywardness, and offered her kind attentions; but they were not sufficient in Lucia's eyes. She required an apology where there had been no just cause of offence, and expected the Countess to profess great regret at the possibility of her returning to Italy. As Father Andrea had left them early that morning, Beatrice had found no time for conversation before he went, and did not like to make him uncomfortable at the last moment. He was to return soon, and before

that Lucia's mood might perhaps pass away. But, instead, Lucia became more gloomy. The Countess thought the cause of this might be that there were constant notes from the Grove, and she endeavoured to read them privately, and without comments. Lucia, however, was perpetually alluding to them or to Margaret, and the Countess was obliged to answer her, having no right to surmise that her extreme anxiety to know how poor Mrs. Clive was bearing up under her loss, or what opinion had been expressed of Dr. Percival, proceeded from any but an amiable motive. Lucia tortured herself by making the inquiries, but she could not resist them. If Margaret's notes were read without remark, her irritation became scarcely controllable. If observations were made about them, they were instantly construed to mean not only that the Countess was fond of Margaret, but that she did not like Lucia. Beatrice could not be sorry when Mrs. St. Aubyn called and took Lucia out for a drive, or to spend the day. She was then free to answer Margaret's notes at leisure, or write to Father Andrea concerning any difficult points which she could not fully explain herself; and she could rest on the sofa, and allow herself to be ill and suffering, without being reminded by a jealous affection that she had been miserably imprudent. Her longing to see Margaret grew intense in these hours of solitude; but there was a fresh disappointment every day, and the cold winds prevented her from leaving the house. Still the Countess bore up cheerfully; everything was light when compared with a distrust of Margaret's strength of character.

More than a week had elapsed since Father Andrea's departure. The Countess knew nothing of the state of affairs at Ashington beyond the fact that Agatha was ill and with her parents. This did not strike her as peculiarly strange; but it fretted her, as being an additional claim upon Margaret's time, and rendering it less likely that she should see her. Lucia was gone to dine with Mrs. St. Aubyn, and the Countess interested herself by reading Margaret's notes, which she had preserved from the commencement of their acquaintance, and tracing the steps by which she had been brought to her present state of feeling in regard to the Romish Church. Beatrice was happy in the occupation, for she had reason to hope that it was mainly through her instrumentality that Margaret had been brought so far to a knowledge of what she considered truth. Something of her early romance returned, as she dwelt with delight upon the idea that she had lived for some object; that she had accomplished a work; and that now, if it should please God to call her to

Himself, she might die satisfied in the belief that she had rescued one soul, at least, from the bonds of fatal error. Margaret, humble-minded, yet highly gifted,—pure, sincere, and self-denying, seemed more worthy of her love than ever; and when they were united in one faith, the Countess believed that she should have, as regarded affection, no other earthly wish. But this happiness did not last. Late in the afternoon, Beatrice was standing in the dining-room, looking at the picture of the Viscountess de Lisle. Her attention had been more particularly drawn to it since she had conversed with Margaret upon the history connected with it; and in her sad moods she was apt to fancy that the incidents in the life of her proud ancestress were a prophecy of her own; that her expectations would be disappointed; and that Margaret would prove as unstable as the unfortunate Rachel de Lisle. Even then, when she was so much more hopeful, a foreboding stole over her, disagreeable recollections came to her mind—Lucia's observations upon the low tone of the family, and a remembrance of Margaret's former procrastination, together with her present perplexities, which were often irritating to the Countess's impatience. It was a natural reaction after a fit of enthusiasm, to which Beatrice was often subject, and which the hour of the day served to increase. The evening was closing in, grey clouds were fast gathering over the bright western sky, and the distant landscape was growing indistinct. There were few signs of life to be heard, for the servants were in a distant part of the house; and the Countess, weary and in pain, was overcome by a sense of loneliness. Margaret trusted her more fully than she trusted Margaret. In all the distressing scenes which had lately passed at the Grove, Margaret's affection had known no alternations from any oppression of spirits. She was as true to the Countess at one moment as at another. But Beatrice was ill, feverish, and restless, and unable to exercise her usual self-command. Where she loved, she loved sincerely; but she was actuated by impulse, and swayed by outward circumstances; and Margaret would scarcely have recognised in the wayward, desponding mind, which in the evening was conjuring up doubts and difficulties, the same friend who had a few hours before believed that her best wishes were about to be accomplished. The twilight had become darkness; but the Countess was indisposed for exertion, and neither books, writing, nor work could be an amusement to her. She was summoning up her energy to rise from the sofa, when the noise of carriage wheels announced Lucia's return. It was much earlier than Beatrice anticipated,

and though solitude was then dreary, she was not inclined for this interruption. She rose, rang the bell for lights, and stirred the fire, unwilling that Lucia should think her over-fatigued. A cheerful voice also was assumed when Lucia came in, and the Countess endeavoured, as much as she could, to conceal that she had been lonely or unhappy. But the restraint was annoying, and Lucia discovered that her welcome was not cordial.

'Mrs. St. Aubyn had promised to spend the evening with her brother," she said, in answer to the Countess's question why she was so early returned. "He wants a companion, poor man!"

"I suppose so, now his wife is away," replied Beatrice, trying to appear interested. "Have you heard how Mrs. Clive is?"

"I did not know there was much the matter with her," said Lucia.

"Oh, yes; you must have heard. Don't you remember my telling you what Margaret — Miss Percival — has said in her notes about Mrs. Clive being ill?"

"Miss Percival's version of the story," observed Lucia, shortly, and the light falling upon her face, showed that it wore an expression of satire. The Countess did not, as usual, put an end to the conversation, when the family at the Grove were its subjects. "Mrs. St. Aubyn is very much shocked, and so is every one," continued Lucia; "and no wonder."

"Yes, the poor baby's death was very sudden at last," said the Countess.

Lucia smiled, but only looked an answer; and when she saw that Beatrice was curious, went away to take off her shawl and bonnet and prepare for tea. The Countess, again left alone, resolved to be cautious, and not ask any questions to which she should be likely to receive disagreeable answers. Whatever there might be to tell, she would be certain to hear from Margaret. Besides, it was necessary to talk to Lucia upon another subject. A letter from Father Andrea that day had mentioned that the Countess's friend, Lady Anstruther, intended soon to go to Italy, and Beatrice wished to sound Lucia as to her intention of remaining in England. If she were still decided upon going, it would be happier for both parties that the separation should take place soon. In Lucia's present state her life at Henningsley was necessarily wretched, and Beatrice was satisfied that on her part every sacrifice of personal wishes had been made, which duty required; so that she had no hesitation in concurring with, and furthering her expressed desires.

Lucia returned to the drawing-room, unsuspicious of the shock

which awaited her. Moody, jealous persons, frequently imagine that they may indulge their humour, and only offend themselves; they have no idea of the pain they inflict by half sighs, and melancholy tones, and Lucia fully believed that she might be as gloomy as she chose without really vexing the Countess. Beatrice was at all times gentle, and dignified in manner, and the very strength of her feeling for Margaret caused a particular reserve in every case in which she was the cause of difference. Lucia had often been annoyed at not perceiving a greater effect from her observations; but the arrow wounded, though she did not discover it. The Countess kept up the conversation for a little while upon indifferent topics; but at length, being desirous to see how her communication would be received, she said, "Did you know that I heard from Father Andrea to-day?"

"I saw his handwriting," was the reply.

"He will not be here directly, for he is going into Kent; but he wishes me to follow him to London," continued the Countess. "Lady Anstruther will be there for some time before she goes to Italy, and he thinks that will be a comfort to me. I certainly require medical advice."

"Lady Anstruther going to Italy!" said Lucia.

"Yes. She is to take her child to Florence for the winter—in fact, the physician says she must live abroad for a few years. It might be fortunate for us if she were going immediately.' Lucia was surprised, and looked up from her work. "I mean fortunate as far as any of our plans are concerned," pursued the Countess.

"Ours! but, Signora—surely you do not,—you cannot be thinking of returning home?" Lucia's moodiness vanished as the idea presented itself. Her dark eyes were unwontedly brilliant in their expression of satisfaction, and Beatrice could not help being sorry for the disappointment in store for her. "I was not thinking of myself so much, Lucia," she said, in a gentle tone; "but when I heard of Lady Anstruther's plans, it struck me that since you are so anxious to revisit your friends, it would be——" The Countess was not allowed to finish the sentence.

"A good opportunity for me to go?" said Lucia, speaking very slowly.

Beatrice hesitated to answer; she appeared busy with her embroidery frame. "It would be much pleasanter for you," she said, after a few moments' pause, "and much more satisfactory to me; because under other circumstances, you would be obliged to travel with strangers."

Lucia's heart was nearly bursting with grief and vexation. She was entangled, as it were, in her own snare. The many occasions on which she had lately repeated that she was resolved to leave Henningsley, whenever a good opportunity offered itself, had then been treasured up against her. Her petulant, idle words had been received as a serious resolution. Tears rushed to her eyes, but her pride checked them.

"I must be very anxious for your happiness, Lucia," continued the Countess, "though I am so little able to promote it. It is doubtless better for us both to part, but I would use every endeavour to make the separation easy."

"There can be no difficulty in that, Signora," said Lucia, bitterly; "to you, at least."

"You do me wrong, Lucia," replied Beatrice: "it is very hard to part: it would be still more so, if I were not convinced that whilst you are with me you can never be satisfied. If you had no relations in Italy, I should not have entertained the idea, however you might have urged it; but since you are not friendless, it is certainly desirable that in this case you should follow your own will."

Lucia threw down her work, and walked to the fireplace. The Countess followed her with a pang of conscience, for having too willingly acquiesced in the idea. She approached Lucia, and would have kissed her, but Lucia drew back her head, saying, "May I ask what day you have fixed on for my departure?"

The Countess had been prepared for a torrent of grief, perhaps even reproaches, but she could not tell how to contend against this cold disdain; and she expected to see it give way, and be succeeded by a violent burst of passion. "We will not talk about it any more just now," she said; "it is distressing to us both: when Father Andrea is with us, he will be more able to advise you than I am."

"No, no," exclaimed Lucia, vehemently; "wait for Father Andrea! I would rather leave you this very night. Since I am an incumbrance, I will go—by myself, to morrow,—I care not how soon. I will return to Italy. There are friends there who will acknowledge, and never cast me off."

Beatrice was unprepared with a reply, and sat down again, whilst Lucia remained in her former position, mechanically moving and replacing some of the ornaments on the mantel-piece. A silence ensued; the Countess thought that Lucia would go to her own room; but these were not circumstances under which Lucia could think of solitude. The struggle in her mind was fearful;

and at last, jealousy gained the victory over pride, and broke forth: "It is unworthy of you to conceal the truth, Signora. Say at once that you no longer love me. Miss Percival will be at hand to fill my place. The heretic faith can be no matter of consideration, after the many months of intimacy." The haughty spirit of the De Lisles was roused by this taunt. The flush of fever which was burning on the Countess's cheek died away, and her lips were firmly pressed together, in the effort of retaining the words which would fain have replied to it. "You cannot answer me," continued Lucia. "I thank you for your silence, Signora; it tells me all."

"It tells you, Lucia," said the Countess, raising her eyes with an expression of stern forbearance, "that your words are ungrateful and unbecoming. The proposal that we should part came from you."

"And the cause!" rejoined Lucia: "who was it drove me to it? who was it robbed me of your affections? Fawning, mercenary ——"

"Hush, Lucia!" interrupted Beatrice; "be careful. If Miss Percival's name is uttered by you this night with any terms of disrespect, to-morrow we part for ever."

Lucia trembled: for even in the height of her passion, she stood in awe of the Countess's commanding voice and manner. "I have no desire to speak with disrespect of her, or of any person," she said, more calmly, but with increased bitterness. "I would say only the truth. Let us part when and how we may, your happiness must ever be dearer to me than life; and when I see you deceived, it can scarcely be strange that I should wish to open your eyes."

The Countess knew the spirit in which this observation was made, and her generous disposition instantly repelled the insinuation against Margaret; but her affection was not invulnerable. She listened, though every word was a dagger, and Lucia continued: "I will not speak of myself, Signora, I would only request you to hearken to the opinion of your friends. Miss Percival is in great estimation at Henningsley. It would be happy for her if the same opinion were entertained elsewhere."

"I do not choose to hear these absurd mysteries, Lucia," replied the Countess, in a tone of weariness; "what have you to say against Miss Percival? Speak openly, for you will never rest satisfied until you have done so."

"Nay," said Lucia, ironically, "it can be nothing to me. If Miss Percival is the common subject of conversation in the neigh-

bourhood, and if every one blames her, even more than her parents, — I am not her friend."

"Blames!" repeated the Countess, leaning forward with eagerness; "who ventures to blame Margaret?"

"No one would do so, doubtless," replied Lucia, "if it were known that the Countess Novera was willing to answer for her; but there has been great wrong somewhere. Mrs. Clive has quarrelled with her husband; she has left him now, when he is suffering from the loss of his child; she has protested that under no circumstances will she return; and report says that Miss Percival is the counsellor and the abettor of such conduct."

"Folly! low-minded scandal!" exclaimed Beatrice, whilst a smile of derision curled her lip. Lucia did not repeat her assertion, for she knew the Countess's disposition well, and was certain that she would not be contented without inquiring into the statement fully. "Quarrelled with her husband?" repeated Beatrice, after a few moments' silence.

"It is scandal," said Lucia. "But Mrs. Clive left Ashington in company with Miss Percival, on the very day the Colonel returned. That information came from Mrs. St. Aubyn."

"And Margaret not to have mentioned it!" murmured Beatrice to herself.

"Miss Percival could not have suspected your disapproval," said Lucia. The Countess's face betrayed her emotion, and Lucia was almost sorry for the pain she was inflicting. "You have little feeling for me, Signora," she said, with greater gentleness of manner than she had yet shown; "but the love of the orphan girl, whom you have cherished from childhood, cannot be shaken by disappointment. If Miss Percival were worthy of your affection, I could return to Italy and be happy; no, not happy — that cannot be, when absent from you — but satisfied in the thought that you were so."

Beatrice was struck by Lucia's manner, for however she might condemn her jealousy, she had no doubt of her truth.

"I do not suppose, Lucia," she said, "that you can intentionally mean to distress me, but you have been imposed upon by some idle rumours. When I know better what they are, I will show you how wrong it is to believe evil hastily."

This permission was all which Lucia desired; and she immediately began to detail the facts that had come to her knowledge, of the frequent disagreements between Agatha and her husband, which, she said, had been encouraged by Margaret, who, having originally disliked the marriage, — Mrs. St. Aubyn thought from

a feeling of jealousy, that her sister should hold a higher position in society than herself, — had ever since shown her aversion both to the Colonel and Mrs. St. Aubyn in a marked manner.

"Mrs. St. Aubyn wished to be kind to her, Signora," she added; "and you may judge from her attention to me what she would have done for a near connection; but Miss Percival's icy manner could never be overcome. Mrs. Clive was always more fond of her sister than of any one else; and Mrs. St. Aubyn says she is sure that everything might have been put on a right footing, if she had only exerted herself. Mrs. Percival did all she could; but when the sisters upheld each other, her wishes were of no avail. What was the real cause of Mrs. Clive's taking that very strange step, — leaving Ashington, — no one can exactly tell. The servants report that there was some difference of opinion about carrying the child to London for advice; at any rate it is quite certain that Miss Percival approved, and declared there was nothing else to be done; and ever since then she has appeared quite indifferent, — never expressed any regret, and pretended that it was natural, and that Mrs. Clive required her health to be watched; whilst all the time, in secret, she has been urging her sister to remain where she is, and not allowing a note or a word to pass between her and her husband."

"And for what object does Mrs. St. Aubyn pretend to say that Margaret Percival can act in this manner?" asked the Countess, proudly.

"Mrs. St. Aubyn pretends nothing, Signora; she repeats only what she knows to be fact. Other persons state that the Percivals have been ruined by the extravagance of the elder son, that they are indignant at receiving no assistance from Colonel Clive; and that in revenge they — especially Miss Percival — have fomented the division between him and his wife, in the hope that if affairs are brought to a crisis, he may be prevailed on to buy a peace, by settling a handsome sum on Mrs. Clive. If that should be the case, of course Mrs. Clive will continue to live at the Grove, and help to keep up the family fortunes."

"Really! Lucia," exclaimed Beatrice, greatly indignant, "this is worse than I could possibly have imagined. What can induce you to listen to such unfounded calumnies? What evidence is there to prove, in the least, one word of what you have said?"

"Merely the evidence of general opinion, as to the mercenary character of the family," replied Lucia, in a provoking tone; "besides certain known facts. You yourself, Signora, can judge

whether Miss Percival ever spoke of Colonel Clive in any terms of regard."

"She never did the contrary," replied Beatrice.

"Perhaps not. Miss Percival seems to have practised a curious reserve as to the whole business."

The Countess inwardly writhed under the wound inflicted by this observation. It was the point on which she was peculiarly susceptible; and during all Lucia's details, the circumstance which had rested the most unpleasantly on her mind was that Margaret had kept back the confidence which she deemed to be rightly her due.

"I do not wish to prejudice you, Signora," continued Lucia; "but it must doubtless be desirable that you should consider whether Miss Percival's affection is likely to give you comfort. A heretic, too, a Protestant!"

"There at least you are mistaken, Lucia," exclaimed Beatrice, betrayed into a sudden incautiousness. "Margaret Percival will, before many months are over, be one with us."

Lucia's countenance evinced no surprise; but as she stepped forward, and placed herself opposite the Countess, a smile of keen satire played upon her lip, whilst she answered,—

"And do you really believe this, Signora?"

"As firmly as I believe in my own devotion to our holy Church," replied the Countess.

Lucia considered for an instant, and then said, in an under tone,—

"It is strange: then Mrs. St. Aubyn was right."

"Mrs. St. Aubyn again!" observed the Countess, quickly; "what has she to say as to Margaret Percival's religion?"

"Mrs. St. Aubyn is clear-sighted," replied Lucia. "I one day noticed Miss Percival's apparent interest in the Catholic Church, and she replied that Miss Percival was playing with you; that she had no intention whatever of sacrificing her family happiness by changing her religion."

"And what grounds can Mrs. St. Aubyn have for making such a declaration."

"Really I cannot pretend to say; but she has known Miss Percival so long, she must be aware of her disposition."

The Countess, with an impatient gesture, remarked that it was a curious subject to converse upon.

"A very natural one," replied Lucia; "Miss Percival's intimacy here, and her attention to the Catholic peasantry on the Henningsley estate, have been observed by every one."

"And Mrs. St. Aubyn is not charitable enough to suppose that Margaret's eyes are becoming open to her errors?"

"In some cases such a conclusion might be warranted, Signora; but you may judge for yourself. Miss Percival, whilst affecting to inquire after truth, is in constant correspondence with her uncle, an English clergyman, a most decided opponent of our holy faith."

A smouldering spark of distrust revived in the Countess's breast as Lucia said this. It was the distrust she had before entertained when Mr. Sutherland had been casually mentioned. She would not, however, acknowledge it; and, suddenly rising, proposed that they should retire to rest, though it was earlier than the usual hour. Whilst still lingering in the room, however, she allowed Lucia to perceive that her words had taken effect; for stopping, as she was collecting her work, she said, haughtily,—

"Mrs. St. Aubyn, with all her ingenuity, cannot at least believe that Margaret has any interest in misleading me."

"Indeed," replied Lucia, incredulously, "it would seem to me that Miss Percival has already gained much by her pretended zeal for religion. She has won your affection, and doubtless she hopes to profit by it."

"I repel your insinuations, Lucia," exclaimed the Countess, unable any longer to control herself; "I take shame to myself for having listened to them. Margaret is upright and pure in every thought; she would endure any suffering rather than give cause for the least of the base calumnies which have been set abroad concerning her."

"Then try her, test her," replied Lucia; and she laughed scornfully.

"Test her! How?"

"Tell her that, as a Protestant, she has nothing to expect from you. Repeat the vow by which you are pledged to give up everything to the interests of the Church, and then see,—will she love you still?"

Beatrice scarcely listened to the last words. Agitated and wretched, she hurried from the apartment; and it was not till she had reached her own chamber that a feeling of overpowering indignation succeeded, as she more fully comprehended the taunt with which the conversation had concluded.

CHAPTER LVI.

And Lucia Fontana was then a slanderer, wilfully endeavouring to prejudice the Countess Novera against an innocent person. Yet such was not exactly the case. Lucia had said nothing which she had not some reason to suppose true; but under the influence of jealousy and disappointment she had forgotten the Christian rule, "not to speak evil one of another." Have we not all at times sinned in like manner? Repeating tales which have been circulated in general society, drawing wrong inferences from known facts, or, asserting positively statements which have originally been made hypothetically? There is but one safe line for us all,—the line drawn by the Bible. The evil which we hear must be buried in our own bosoms, unless drawn forth by an undoubted call of duty. If we venture to overstep this mark, we break a direct command, and cannot be guiltless of the consequences of our careless words. But, whether true or false, Lucia's hints were equally destructive of the Countess's peace of mind. If an open accusation had been made, contradictory facts might have been brought to disprove it; but there is no arguing against inferences. We may draw one conclusion, our friends may draw another, and which is right time only can decide. Beatrice lay awake a great part of the night, striving to convince herself that all which Lucia had said was the result of jealous unkindness, whilst haunted by remembrances of Margaret's want of confidence, and her own fruitless efforts to penetrate the mystery in which Dr. Percival's family affairs had lately been involved. Lucia's remarks, indeed, afforded no tangible ground of offence. Margaret could not be proved to have done anything which the world had a right to condemn; but the mere idea that she could be talked of, censured, supposed to be influenced by low motives, was sufficient to destroy the charm with which Beatrice had in imagination invested her. She was no longer separate from her family, raised above them by the purity and elevation of her character. She was not Margaret,—the cherished, accomplished, refined friend, to whom every thought could be confided, but Miss Percival,—the daughter of the worldly Dr. Percival,—the pupil of a bustling, common-minded mother,—the sister of the cold-hearted, money-loving Mrs. Clive. Mr. Sutherland had rightly warned Margaret of the natural instability of an unequal friendship. Had Beatrice moved in a lower sphere she would

never have been as susceptible of doubt, for she would have mixed with Margaret's family, and understood the difficulties of her position; and the circumstances which now seemed to threaten the security of their affection, might then have served to unite them more closely to each other.

The Countess and Margaret were to meet on the following day. How Margaret's heart bounded with pleasure as the thought came to her mind when she awoke! Illness and anxiety, petty cares, and doubts, and fears, were alike for the moment forgotten. The day opened brightly, and the young, hopeful spirit, which early trials had not yet subdued into equanimity, seemed to shake off every weight, and almost to rejoice as in the days of untroubled childhood. Such moments come to us in the spring time of life as suddenly though not as frequently as the forebodings of fear, but they are gone almost as soon as tasted. Margaret's gladness vanished in an instant when she remembered Miss Debrett's conversation. She reminded herself that it was doing the Countess injustice to imagine that she could be so easily wrought upon by reports; but nevertheless the fear of some change rankled in her breast; and she counted the hours which must intervene before she saw Beatrice, from a sense that her mind would not be at ease until then. Sometimes she thought that she would tell every thing,—Craven's folly, and the pecuniary difficulties, and Agatha's wilful neglect of duty; but pride stopped her. The Countess was not like a common friend, she was too superior to enter into these every-day troubles. Her peculiar position shielded her from them. But again, confidence seemed just now essential to affection, and Beatrice evidently expected more than she received. It might be best to be guided by circumstances as to how much or how little was to be told; but at all events it could scarcely be difficult to explain that she had no participation in her sister's misconduct.

The post-bag was now dreaded by Margaret, and indeed by every one in the family who had any powers of observation. Margaret could not overcome a fear of hearing something more of extravagance from Craven, though he had given no fresh cause for suspicion, and Dr. Percival was in great agitation whenever he opened a letter of business. There were several for him on this morning, and when they were read Mrs. Percival came out of his room much discomposed, and sent immediately for Mr. Prior. Margaret knew quite well that something unpleasant was going on; it did not appear very alarming, but Mr. Prior was always associated with money matters, and the natural supposition was that he was called in to consult upon the failing fortunes of the

family. Margaret did then wish herself a man—able to work, to gain money in any way. It seemed that as a woman she could only be a burden. There was no one to whom they could apply for any immediate assistance, for they had few relations, and those but little known personally; and though living respectably and comfortably, they could not be supposed to have a large sum of ready money at command. Mr. Sutherland was a poor man, just able by great self-denial to take care of his parish, but nothing more. Margaret did not believe that her family were destined to starve upon nothing; but she saw that a considerable change must be undergone, and she grieved especially for George. His college expenses would be a serious item in the yearly accounts, and Dr. Percival had more than once talked of removing him from Oxford, and placing him in a merchant's office to please his godfather. Margaret alone was aware how great a trial this would be. She knew how entirely her brother's heart was given to his intended profession, and she could not bear to think of the blank which would spread itself over his life, if the prospect of taking orders were destroyed. Once or twice she had hinted the subject to her mother; but Mrs. Percival would not hear of the possibility of any such alteration in their circumstances as to render the step necessary. She lived upon hope, and until this day had derived from it a very substantial support. Now, however, when she came into the school-room after Mr. Prior was gone, Margaret saw that the world was not even as bright as usual. Her mother looked very anxious. "Margaret, my dear, I must speak to you directly. Children, don't tease your sister. Stand away, Philip; Margaret cannot attend to you just this minute."

Margaret gave a few directions to the children, and then followed Mrs. Percival into another room.

"It is very strange, Margaret," began her mother, immediately that the door was closed, "I never understood clearly before what a state Craven has brought us into. Your father talks of being obliged to raise money—actually raise it upon the insurances. He tells me he has consulted Mr. Prior, and when I asked him what will become of us, if he does, in the event of any thing happening to him, all he can say is, he does not know. Do you think he is in earnest?"

Margaret was a little inclined to smile at the notion; it was not a question upon which the father of a family was likely to jest. "If you remember, mamma," she said, "I told you some time since that it was likely to come to this soon. My father

mentioned it once in the course of conversation, and I saw directly that unless his health improved materially there was nothing else to be done."

"Strange!" again repeated Mrs. Percival; "such a good income as he has always had, and no one can accuse us of extravagance. It is extremely hard that things should reach this pass through Craven's folly."

Margaret did not think it hard, because that would have been repining at Providence; and seeing that the cheerfulness of the family was likely to depend upon her, she expressed a hope, which in her heart was but very slight, that her father might soon be well. The hope, however, had just the contrary effect from her anticipations. Mrs. Percival became much graver than before, whilst she said that if domestic affairs were to continue as harassing as they then were, she would not answer for the consequences. Mr. Harrison had said that quiet of mind was essential, and had proposed to have Dr. Hastings called in for a consultation, he thought so badly of Dr. Percival.

"And papa will not hear of that, of course," said Margaret. "He looks upon Dr. Hastings as an intruder, because people say he intends to settle in Staunton."

"That was what I should have supposed, Margaret," replied Mrs. Percival, "but, one never can answer for men's fancies. Your father does not at all object. He is very much altered lately, certainly. He will submit to anything."

Mrs. Percival's notions of submission, at the moment, were of obedience to the law of a medical man; but Margaret thought of accordance with the will of God, and she did really hope, that in this respect her father was altered.

"Perhaps papa would like me to sit with him a little while," she said. "I can set the children to work by themselves, and I know you and Agatha were going out."

"Ah! poor Agatha!" exclaimed Mrs. Percival, heaving a sigh; "that is something else to be sorry for. Such a blighted life! She will never be what she was, Margaret."

It was not a pleasant subject for Margaret to discuss, especially with the expectation of being obliged to explain it to the Countess Novera. Try as she would to be charitable, it was not possible to shut her eyes to the fact that Agatha was the author of her own trial and of others also. "She can never be happy, mamma, until she is forgiven by Colonel Clive."

"Forgiven! Margaret, my love, how wildly you talk! It is she, poor child, who has to forgive everything."

"A good deal, I own, mamma; but the overt act of the quarrel was hers, and the world thinks so, and condemns her and us in consequence."

Mrs. Percival looked very unhappy, as she remembered the delightful prospects in which she had once indulged for her daughter, whilst the tenderness of a mother made her repel every idea of blame attaching to her. "I must tell you, Margaret, that you are too young to decide upon these subjects," she replied. "Girls should trust to the judgment of their elders and not form hasty opinions. The reconciliation will come by and by, when the Colonel sees how badly he has treated her."

In former days Margaret's had been a proud spirit; but that time was past. Even had religious principle not rendered her humble, she was too unhappy to resent such an observation. Besides it might be true—at all events, she had no reason, from late experience, to suppose her judgment good. "I will go to papa," she said, mildly, "if you think he would like to have me."

Mrs. Percival was glad of the proposition; "but there were many things," she observed, "which it was necessary to talk over together. They must determine upon parting with some of the servants, and lessening their expenses. Still things could not be done in a hurry; they would just wait and see what opinion Dr. Hastings gave, and by that time Mr. Sutherland might be at home." Margaret answered,—

"That her uncle could do but little for them. If retrenchment were requisite, it seemed that the sooner it began the better."

"Yes, my dear, certainly; but there is no hurry to day; and your father is fanciful. I can't help hoping he sees things worse than they really are."

"Scarcely possible," thought Margaret; but she did not consider herself called upon to remonstrate farther. As her mother had said, there was no hurry for that day.

Mrs. Percival's sanguine spirit was rising again, merely because she had talked of her anxieties. She remarked, that worse storms had passed away, and Margaret could not contradict the fact, though the experience had not been granted to their own family. Leaving the children, as she now often was compelled to do, to pursue their employments alone, she went to her father's room, to soothe him, if possible, by a few cheerful observations, and then direct his mind to higher comfort by offering to read to him the Psalms and lessons for the day, to which for some weeks he had professed himself willing and happy to listen.

CHAPTER LVII.

WHEN Margaret reached Henningsley late in the afternoon, she found symptoms of uneasiness in the household, though not so great as those which she had left behind her at the Grove. The Countess's maid hearing her voice, came to meet her in the hall.

"Her mistress," she said, "was not well, and had not left her room. She had given orders to be denied to every one except Miss Percival."

"What was the matter?" Margaret asked.

Lauretta did not know, "but her lady had looked ill lately, and complained of sleeping badly. In her own opinion the place did not agree with her, and she was not at all sorry to hear the Countess say this morning that she thought of leaving it immediately." A cold chill struck upon Margaret's heart when she heard this. She stood still, and Lauretta, who considered her time peculiarly precious when her mistress was ill, began to be impatient. Margaret inquired if there was any other person at home. She had a half-dread of meeting Father Andrea. Lauretta "believed that the Signorina Fontana was in the garden, but she was not sure;" and as she spoke, Lucia appeared. A scowl gathered on her brow at the sight of the unwelcome visitor. She bowed distantly, and hurried on, stopping however when she was hidden from view, to watch with a jealous eye whilst Margaret hastened up the private staircase which led to the Countess's apartments. Margaret's admission to the presence of Beatrice was a grievance the most unpardonable of all. She herself had been excluded.

"I have always melancholy associations with this staircase, Lauretta," said Margaret, pausing at the top, and pointing to the narrow, winding flight of steps, which ascending still higher, led to the chamber that had been occupied by Rhoda Newbolt. "Do you remember the poor girl who died?"

Lauretta shuddered, and then smiled. "It was a gloomy time," she said; "but Father Andrea had assured them that it was a blessed one. She often heard him wish that all English people could be as sure of salvation."

Margaret was heard to sigh, and then the girl blushed, conscious that she might have given pain.

"Rhoda loved you much, Signorina," she said. "She often prayed for you."

"Are you sure of that?" inquired Margaret, with greater eagerness of manner than she had intended to betray.

"Ah, Signorina, it was not once, but hundreds of times, and she made us all, Father Andrea, and every one, promise we would pray too; but the holy father had no need to be reminded."

"He does, then, think of me and interest himself about me," thought Margaret, "and he makes others think also. Who, but my uncle, has such a care for me in the English Church?" Lauretta shared something of her mistress's regard for Margaret, whose gentleness and courtesy were in marked contrast to Lucia's manner. She waited at the door of the Countess's chamber, half hoping that Margaret would say something else; but Margaret for once was unmindful of the kind words which cost so little, and make such certain friends. Her thoughts had turned from Rhoda and the unknown state of existence upon which she had entered, to the reception which she was about to meet from the Countess Novera.

Had Beatrice been asked upon what peculiar quality she most prided herself, she would have named self-command — the power of retaining the same calm exterior, whatever might be her inward agitation. But the eye of affection is too keen for any such concealment. Margaret saw that she was not received as usual. The gentle tones of endearment, the kiss, and the smile of pleasure were expected and received; but then a change came over the Countess's manner, a restraint which she evidently strove to shake off, whilst with affectionate reproaches she assured Margaret how lonely she had been since they last parted.

"Even Father Andrea is gone from me now," she said, "so that I have only Lucia with me; and you know she is not the most congenial companion I could have."

"I met the Signorina Fontana in the hall," replied Margaret, "and I thought she looked more sad than usual."

"Yes, poor Lucia! she is excessively to be pitied; yet it is her own doing: her jealous moods are worse for herself even than for me."

"They have made you ill," said Margaret, casting an anxious glance at the Countess's pale face, as she lay on the sofa, apparently worn with fatigue, when the day was scarcely more than half over.

Beatrice slightly blushed, and her eyes were averted from Margaret, whilst she answered:—"I am not affected enough by them, I am afraid, to make me ill."

"But you are ill, dear Beatrice, your hand is burning."

The Countess laughed faintly. "You are so accustomed to illness, Margaret, that you see it where it hardly exists. Tell me about your own invalids; your father, and—your sister."

Something in the intonation of the voice struck Margaret disagreeably; the sentence sounded formal, and her reply was in the same style; yet she hated herself for it, was ashamed of being suspicious, and only trusted that the Countess would be candid if she had anything upon her mind. A similar train of thought suggested itself to Beatrice, and she paused to give Margaret an opportunity for referring more fully to Agatha if she wished it. The interview was unlike every previous one, and Margaret felt that she could not long bear it. She knelt by the Countess, and kissed her many times without speaking, and Beatrice seemed contented with her presence, even if the silence were not broken. But their eyes met, and Margaret's were filled with tears. Beatrice raised herself suddenly, and said in a tone of melancholy:—

"Margaret, I sometimes think that you and I were not born for happiness."

"Do you?" and Margaret smiled through her tears; "then it is I who have taught you to think so. I have no right to disturb your peace with my troubles."

"Not if I would rather, a thousand times rather, know them than be ignorant?"

"Dear Beatrice, be contented with your ignorance," sighed Margaret. "You could not do me good; I have said so often before."

"And my love is nothing, Margaret?"

"Nothing! Everything; my comfort, and joy, and pride, and therefore I would not sully it with such earthly cares."

"As what?" The Countess spoke in an eager tone, and then withdrew her hand from Margaret's, from a sense of humiliation. How could she stoop to seek for a confidence, which it seemed was not to be given her?

"If I thought," began Margaret—"If I could hope, but—"

Shame tinged her cheek, and dyed her forehead with crimson. In the presence of Beatrice her resolution failed. The painful family details were almost degrading; extravagance, and temper, and a calculating worldly spirit, were perfectly foreign to the Countess's chastened disposition. Beatrice kept her eye fixed steadily before her, but she was secretly impatient. She could not comprehend Margaret's hesitation, willingly as she would herself have shared every family distress with one whom she

loved so truly. After waiting for a few words of encouragement, and finding herself disappointed, Margaret again began:—

"If I thought you were really in earnest, that you could care to hear! but there are so many things—my father's illness, and money matters, and Agatha—:" she could scarcely bring herself to pronounce her sister's name.

The Countess looked up with an expression of satisfaction: "I wanted to hear of her, Margaret, more than all."

She expected an instant reply, but a change came over Margaret. She was proud in her turn; for even the most humble-minded are susceptible sometimes of pride for their relations, which they would never have indulged for themselves.

"I know," she said, "that the world has been busy with my sister's name. Agatha has been accused of cold-heartedness and a fretful temper, which, it is supposed, have caused a disagreement between herself and her husband; but, Beatrice, you cannot wish me to expose the faults of one so near to me."

"Expose! Margaret, no; for myself I should never have asked it. I could not have imagined for an instant that you had any share in causing the separation."

"Me! Oh, Beatrice, who has been so cruel, so unjust? and you to believe it! to think it possible!"

"Dearest Margaret, you are unjust yourself. I did not believe it. I said it was false. I was sure that Lucia had listened to slanders; but own that on one point I have had reason to complain. The world knew everything when I knew nothing."

"No," exclaimed Margaret, indignantly, and she rose quickly, and stood by the Countess with a haughtiness of manner which Beatrice had never before seen her assume; "the world knows nothing. If Agatha has been in error, she has had many wrongs to bear."

"But I could not tell them," said the Countess, reproachfully.

Margaret's transient anger was over, and the fears which had troubled her before the present meeting, again prevailed. "You must forgive me, Beatrice," she said, "if I am hasty. I do not complain of you, but of the harsh-judging world. I was prepared for some misunderstanding before I came, for I knew that Mrs. St. Aubyn was not likely to conceal her unfavourable opinions."

"I will not listen to Mrs. St. Aubyn, or to any one, dearest," replied the Countess. "I will hearken only to yourself. There can be no lips more true and pure than yours. Will you tell me all?"

Still Margaret hesitated; and Beatrice was vexed.

"And after all, you cannot trust me?" she said.

"I see nothing to call forth trust," replied Margaret; "I have no secret to confide, and it would but distress both you and me to recount the series of petty circumstances which have brought matters to their present state. Colonel Clive and Agatha were not happy together. After the child's death, Agatha's feelings were, from circumstances, much excited, and she left her home, and has hitherto kept to her determination of not seeing her husband again. Beatrice, you will not wish me to tell you more in detail?"

"And you?" said the Countess.

"Can you doubt me? Do you think I would not have made every effort to prevent the step?"

The Countess passed her hand before her eyes, and was silent. And this was the explanation? It was not such as she had expected.

"Beatrice, you are satisfied?" asked Margaret, in a tone of painful uncertainty. The Countess's sense of justice reproached her. Yes, she ought to be satisfied; and she looked at Margaret and said that she was. But the bitterness of a half explanation, a partial satisfaction, who does not know it? Margaret judged the Countess by herself; she thought that if she had still any lingering cause of annoyance or suspicion she would tell it. But she did not understand the spirit of the De Lisles. Beatrice was exacting with regard to confidence; and the simple explanation was not enough to undo the effect of Lucia's insinuations. Margaret might have told this before; and now she did not seem aware that Beatrice had any right to complain. The Countess was too proud to suggest that Margaret had been wrong, and, putting on an air of unconcern, she said, "And this, then, is the great mystery!"

"Why will you speak of mysteries, Beatrice, when you know that I never intended to make any? But you shall have no cause to find fault with me again; to see you annoyed adds tenfold to my other trials."

Beatrice was softened by the confession, and her countenance resumed more of its natural expression.

"You shall hear everything else," said Margaret, struggling against the shame which would even then have induced her to be silent. "My father has just now to contend with very serious difficulties. One of my brothers has given him great anxiety; he has been very extravagant, and we must be the sufferers. The money which would have provided for my mother and for all

of us must be applied to the present emergency; and unless my father should recover, and be able to pursue his profession again, there must be some great change made by us. We cannot continue to live as we are now doing."

Whilst Margaret spoke, her faltering accents betraying the struggle of her mind, the Countess's generous nature had been recovering its rightful sway. She was grieved that she had, as it were, extorted this family history, and the punishment was found in the consciousness that Margaret must suffer, and that she could not offer her assistance. She clasped Margaret's hand with the warmth and tenderness of their first affection, and said, "Yours is a hard lot, my own Margaret, always to suffer for the faults of others."

"I would not call it hard, Beatrice," replied Margaret, whilst, as repressed sorrow gained the mastery over forced composure, her tears fell fast; "God knows, I would say it from my heart, that no trials can be greater than I deserve; but care seems to have come upon me suddenly, early, and I am too weak to bear it rightly."

"It cannot be so with your principles," said Beatrice.

Margaret's face told the chord of misery which had been touched. "Religion! that is the worst of all," she said, in a low voice, and she leant her forehead upon the corner of the sofa, too unhappy to continue the conversation.

"And you are not yet satisfied," said the Countess at length, with an accent of impatience, which Margaret was too much absorbed to observe, "after all the questions have been explained."

"I may be when I have seen Father Andrea."

"Still doubtful, Margaret? Oh, when will doubt cease?"

The half-subdued distrust was rising again. Margaret seemed to have reserve upon all points.

"I dare not think when they will cease, or how, Beatrice," said Margaret, raising her head, and speaking in a tone of deep anguish; "my peace will be death to the happiness of a friend whom I have dearly loved."

"A friend! who?—what?"

"My uncle," replied Margaret; "the truest and best friend whom I had ever known till I knew you. He was my adviser in all things; a clergyman of the English Church. He has been ill; he is only just recovered; and when he hears, as he must hear, of my doubts, the consequences must be upon my head."

"It has been thus in all cases, dearest," said the Countess,

relieved at the voluntary mention of Mr. Sutherland. "It is the sacrifice which all are called to make who would relinquish error for truth."

"And if it should not be truth, Beatrice?"

Margaret's voice was almost sepulchral. Standing on the verge of the abyss, her eyes were for a moment opened to behold the darkness, which imagination had so lately converted into light. The Countess could little brook the suggestion.

"Your mind is distracted by family anxieties," dearest Margaret," she said. "When they are over you will see everything plainly."

"And when will that be, Beatrice?"

"Soon, I trust, very soon. These trials come to every one at some time or other; but if we have faith, there is always found a way of escape."

A faint smile passed over Margaret's face. "You speak like one who has always had wealth at command. Faith may give us comfort, but we are never told that it will give us money."

"Our daily bread," replied the Countess.

"Yes, but not luxuries; and we have lived in luxury, and, I fear, have been unthankful."

"You have not, Margaret."

"Yes, indeed; I as well as others. I have received my blessings as things of course. I have scarcely realised that they were blessings till now, when it seems that I must lose them."

"But it cannot be," exclaimed the Countess, who, totally unused to anything approaching to privation, except so far as it was enforced by the discipline of her Church, could not understand the extent of Margaret's fears.

"It must and will be," said Margaret. "If my father cannot provide for us, we must provide for ourselves."

A natural impulse would at that instant have hurried the Countess to the sacrifice of her whole fortune to save Margaret from privation; but the vow by which she was bound checked even the common expressions of sympathy. "Oh, Margaret," she exclaimed, "if we were but sisters."

"We may be in affection," replied Margaret, "and that will make all my troubles light."

"No; not all. Margaret, I cannot bear that you should suffer."

"Do not be impatient for me, dearest Beatrice," said Margaret, in a tone of gentle reproach; "that would indeed grieve me."

"But can you believe that I feel for you in everything; that I would be to you as a sister really?"

"I am sure you will be to me as a sister for the future, as you have been already. I can never be grateful enough for your friendship."

The allusion to gratitude stung the Countess to the quick. "Margaret," she said, "if we were sisters, all would be one with us, home, wealth, all things."

Margaret could scarcely avoid putting the natural construction upon this remark. She was pained both for Beatrice and herself, and tried to evade the subject by again expressing her sense of the Countess's affection; but becoming confused, her words were awkward, and she was misunderstood.

"You have no reason to thank me, Margaret, for anything," said the Countess, with a look of great distress. "I have done nothing to call forth gratitude."

"Nothing! — when you have loved me?"

"Love in words; but the most indifferent of your acquaintances has more power to be a real comfort to you than I have."

As she said this, Beatrice forced herself to look at Margaret, in the faint hope that some glimpse of the truth might have dawned upon her. But it was not so.

Margaret was silent and perplexed, and the Countess, unable longer to endure the restraint, continued: "Margaret, it has been the great charm of our intercourse that you have been able to place yourself in my position, to understand me entirely; but it is not so now."

"Not understand you, Beatrice? do you think that any trials can disunite us in heart?"

"Never, never: yet there are circumstances—" she waited for an instant, and then resting her head upon Margaret's shoulder, added impetuously, "Margaret, try to feel as I feel. I knelt by my husband's bed when he was dying. We spoke of the interests of the Church. His heart was given to it, and we were about to part on earth for ever. I pledged myself that my paltry wealth should never be alienated from it;—that it should never be given to one who was not of the true faith. God forgive me that I would recall that solemn vow!" As the last words were spoken, a voice seemed to repeat in the Countess's ear: "Try her, test her, see if she will love you still." It was as the whisper of an evil spirit. Beatrice turned with shame and horror from the doubt; yet the next moment her eyes were fixed upon Margaret. And there was a change; yes, strange and unaccountable as it might seem, Margaret's countenance was clouded as it had not been since the conversation began. She said much of thanks, affection, full con-

fidence; but her manner was constrained, and stopping suddenly, she rose and said that she must go.

Beatrice watched her in dismay, and the jealous whisper arose again — "See if she will love you still."

"I will be here again, dear Beatrice, the day after to-morrow, if possible," said Margaret, in a voice of forced composure.

"It must be then; I am to be in town the following afternoon."

"Going?" and Margaret's face became very pale.

"But for a few days only. I must satisfy Father Andrea by consulting a physician. Do not look so frightened, dear love; there is but little the matter."

Margaret retained the hand which was placed in hers. The thin fingers seemed already to give cause for alarm. She gazed upon the Countess anxiously, and Beatrice smiled a sweet sad smile. "We shall meet again soon, and be happier, Margaret," she said.

Margaret did not echo the hope: the shade of troubled thought gathered again upon her brow, and without seeking for further information as to the Countess's movements, she gave her one long silent kiss and left her.

CHAPTER LVIII.

WHAT was tne cause of Margaret's discomposure? The Countess's passing and most painful suspicion was far indeed from assigning it to the right source, and but for Lucia's hints the idea could never have arisen. But the fact which had been told so naturally struck Margaret as throwing an additional, and a most distressing difficulty, in her path. Once a Romanist, and the Countess, it was certain, would be ready, even eager to place her beyond the reach of her present anxieties. And Margaret could have accepted any favour, and yet have received the testimony of conscience that she had not been for a moment influenced by the expectation of it. But the cold, unsympathising, censorious world, what would it say? If she were to refuse assistance, she would offend the Countess, and deprive herself of the means of being useful to her family. If she were to accept it, a slur would be cast upon the motives of her conversion, which would do injury to her own character, and to the cause of religion. On either side, she might be met by misconstruction; yet Margaret did not allow

the fear of the future to rest upon her mind. Once again in the open air, and left to the freedom of her own reflections, she tried to be thankful that the meeting which she had dreaded had given her no exact cause to suspect the Countess of any change of feeling towards her. "No cause," she said at first; but upon consideration, she was more inclined to say, "slight cause;" for some alteration there undoubtedly was. Beatrice was less trusting than she had been,—more desirous of explanations; and when Margaret went over the conversation in detail, she could not quite convince herself that the Countess was satisfied. But the next interview she resolved should make everything clear; she would be more open about Agatha, for Beatrice was a person to whom nothing less than the most perfect candour was acceptable; and, for the future, every grief and every joy, however secret, should be shared with her. Yet even when arrived at that determination, Margaret was still oppressed and unhappy. It was a most glorious afternoon, in the season when spring appears in its greatest beauty, when every tree is either bursting forth into leaf, or spreading shadows from the masses of its already dense foliage; and often in the days of her childhood had Margaret rejoiced with ecstacy at the sight of such beauty; still oftener in youth had she at such times indulged in romantic imaginations; and with a soberer yet truer delight had she afterwards shared with her uncle the reverent gratitude with which a Christian learns to appreciate the wonderful works of the Almighty. But the power to minister to "a mind diseased," is a power belonging to God alone; and Margaret pursued her walk homewards as insensible to the loveliness spread forth for her enjoyment, as if she had been threading the dark dull alleys of the metropolis.

She entered the house with a persuasion that something untoward must have happened during her absence, for she was growing superstitious as to fancies and forebodings. Brighter countenances, however, were awaiting her than she had seen for many days. Mrs. Percival smiled, and held out a letter, and the children jumping round her, clapped their hands in glee, as they exclaimed —"Uncle Henry is to be here to-night!" "My uncle!"— Margaret's heart beat till she was almost faint; but no one noticed her. She sat down in a chair and read the few lines announcing Mr. Sutherland's intended arrival. He had landed the day before, and slept at the house of a friend; but he was longing, he said, to to see them all, and hoped that nothing would prevent him from being with them by dinner-time. They would find him looking extremely well, quite a different person from what he was when

he left England. "Thank God for that," said Margaret, earnestly, as she folded the note, and gave it again to her mother. She had more cause than any one to be thankful that Mr. Sutherland had gained strength to bear all which might await him.

'My dear Margaret, you look very tired," said Mrs. Percival. "I am afraid you have been walking too far, or perhaps it is the heat. It has become very suddenly warm."

"No, mamma, thank you, I am not tired. Don't you think I shall have time to go and see Miss Debrett, and tell her the news?"

"If you wish it; but I don't know that there is any occasion to give yourself the trouble. Besides your uncle may come during your absence."

The very thing which Margaret desired. The waiting, and listening, and seeing every one else in a state of happy expectation, would be unendurable. She was gone before Mrs. Percival had time to express surprise at her thoughtfulness; but as she walked down the road her ear was strained to catch every sound. A stage-coach passed; it came from the wrong direction, yet Margaret looked at both the outside and inside passengers, to be quite sure that some unforeseen accident had not caused her uncle to travel from the north when he intended to arrive from the south. Miss Debrett hurried to the door when she peeped over the blind and saw Margaret standing there.

"It was very provoking," she observed, "that the latch should be always down when Margaret came; but Susan was gone out on a little errand, and there were so many idle people about that she thought it safest; not that any one was likely to do her harm, but still it was best."

"According to Falstaff's notion, that 'discretion is the better part of valour,'" said Margaret.

"Yes, my dear, exactly. Falstaff, that is in Shakspeare, is it not? I used to learn a good deal out of Shakspeare, when I was at school; but come in and take off your bonnet, and let me say how d'ye do to you."

Margaret entered the parlour, though she would not take off her bonnet, "because," she said, "she had only a few minutes to spare."

"Always busy, I know. It is the way with young people; and very right too. If you are not busy now, my dear, you never will be when you are as old as I am. You have been walking to-day, I suppose?"

"Yes, a little distance." Margaret was more averse than ever from mentioning her visits to Henningsley. "It is nearly dinner-

time now, and I should not have come so late, but that I was sure you would like to know that we are expecting my uncle this evening."

"Mr. Sutherland? Well, that is delightful! and he is come back quite well, I hope."

"We hope so, too. He gives a very good account of himself; but then he is always sanguine."

"And you must be all quite happy. I dare say your poor father is in spirits again at the notion of seeing him?"

"I dare say he is, but I did not go to his room before I came over here: I thought you would be vexed, if you did not know at once."

"Perhaps I might have been: not that I should have thought you unkind, my dear, that I never could do. I was writing about you only this very day to my cousin Anne Duncan. She talks of coming over to see me soon, for she never can rest, she says, till she has persuaded me to go and live with her at Eastlake."

"I imagined that notion was quite given up," said Margaret.

"So did I; but Anne always was persevering when she set her heart upon anything. You know we were brought up together; and then she married, and her husband died; and she says it seems lonely, and she is sure I should like it; but it is all a mistake."

"She should come and live here with you," said Margaret.

"So she would if Staunton were like Eastlake; but that you know it is not. Anne goes to church every day there, and has some poor people to attend to; and she helps to make clothes for them, and so she says her time passes happily."

"But she could go and see poor people here," observed Margaret.

"That would not be the same thing, my dear; Anne always liked to be told what to do, and she says it makes all the difference whether she does what the clergyman wishes, or just what she fancies right herself. It is more in her way, and she takes more interest in it. In fact I know she would not come here for the world."

"Then things must remain as they are, I suppose," said Margaret, in an absent tone.

"Yes, so they must." Yet Miss Debrett's assent was not thoroughly hearty. Her wishes had been excited by the description of her cousin Anne's regular useful life at Eastlake. It seemed a privilege to hallow every day by public prayer; and it might be possible, even for one so weak as herself, to do some good,

under proper guidance. "I don't know how it might be if it were not for all of you," she continued; "perhaps—but it is no use thinking about it, is it? You are not going away, and I never could be happy to leave you."

"Then I wish Mrs. Duncan would not write to you about it," said Margaret, trying to give her attention; "I am sure it only makes you unhappy."

"No, my dear, it does not; but I wish sometimes that things were a little different here. Staunton and Deering are both alike about the services; though I am sure I ought not to say anything against my clergyman, for I hear he does a great deal of good amongst the poor; and I dare say Mr. Stanley does too, only we don't know so much about it." With her late change of opinions, Margaret had imbibed a bitterness against Mr. Stanley, which sometimes extended itself further, even to the Church of which she was still a member, and now she answered harshly, that the English clergy had a fearful amount of neglect to answer for. Miss Debrett looked up surprised.

"I dare say you are right, my dear Margaret. To be sure you must be, you are so clever; but I heard some one say, one day, that clergymen are but men, and that we find fault with them as if they were born angels."

"I was wrong," said Margaret, gravely, and hastily changing the conversation, she referred again to Mr. Sutherland's return, saying that it was possible, in consequence, she might not be able to call and see Miss Debrett the next day. Margaret did not justly estimate the pleasure her visits gave, for Miss Debrett's countenance fell at the announcement, and with a feeling of repining she reverted to Eastlake, and observed that one good thing in living there would be that she should never be in want of a companion. Margaret did not notice the remark. Unselfish though she was, yet her heart was then too full to share another's uneasiness. She looked at her watch, and saw that it wanted only twenty minutes to the dinner hour. If Mr. Sutherland came at all, he must certainly be arrived. Miss Debrett would on no account detain her when she heard the time. She even hurried her away, lest her mother might be vexed, and only twice reminded her not to forget to mention to Mrs. Percival what Anne Duncan had said about Eastlake.

CHAPTER LIX.

"MR. SUTHERLAND is just arrived, ma'am," said Symonds, in answer to Margaret's inquiring glance at the packages in the hall. Margaret recognised the portmanteau and carpet-bag; they seemed strangely natural; like unchanged, familiar faces, when we ourselves, through suffering and trial, have become almost different beings. Philip was watching for her in the lobby, and exclaimed—

"Here she is! Uncle Henry, she is come back!"

Margaret listened for her uncle's voice. He spoke low; but the gentle yet deep tone fell mournfully upon her ear. Had she ever loved any one as well? She paused on the staircase; for, in the greatness of her agitation, physical strength seemed failing her. In another moment Mr. Sutherland's impatience had brought him to meet her. Margaret received his blessing, and returned his fervent kiss, without the power of uttering one word of welcome. A sense of suffocation oppressed her; the struggle of joy and misery. Mr. Sutherland returned to the drawing-room, and Margaret, recovering herself quickly, went with him; and with a life and eagerness which few would have believed to be strained, joined in the questions and remarks which flowed from the whole party. The questions Mr. Sutherland was scarcely allowed time to answer; and the remarks were at length stopped by Mrs. Percival's positive command that every one should go and dress for dinner, or they would all be too late. Margaret was hastening away with the rest; but Mr. Sutherland was not willing to let her pass so easily, and stopping her as she was about to leave the room, said —

"One word, Margaret." Margaret trembled, and glanced round the apartment, hoping that some one might be present; but they were alone. "I had not time to answer your last letter about Agatha — I was too much hurried; and I knew we should probably meet very soon. You must have thought it unkind, I am afraid."

"Oh, no! never. Nothing that you could do could be unkind."

"Yet some persons might have considered it so; but you know me too well to doubt how I accord with all you feel. It is a miserable case, and must have been a shock to you in every way."

"Except that you always prophesied evil," said Margaret, satisfied at finding that the conversation was in no way to refer to herself.

"So I did; but I am not certain that I was prepared for this. Yet we will hope still, Margaret. In this and in everything, we will put our trust where we ought, and hope."

What right have I to trust? thought Margaret when she went to dress; and she wandered off into abstruse speculations as to the foundation of trust or faith; how it could be available, when the grounds on which it rested were unsafe; how far false doctrine and true faith were compatible; the extent of guilt that attached to erroneous creeds; and other questions of a like kind, which made her confess the impotency of human reason, and long for the repose even of credulity. They followed her when she joined the family party, until the mixture of abstraction in her own thoughts, and occasional warm interest in her uncle's conversation, attracted notice. Then she exerted herself more, talked, and even laughed; but the laugh was discordant to her own ear, and had in it something startling to Mr. Sutherland's. He had looked forward to this meeting for weeks, ever since he had been told that he might return to England without danger. Amongst the many anticipated pleasures in being restored to his home, the chief was the delight of seeing Margaret. Now she sat near him, the same Margaret, with the clear bright eye, the dark braided hair, the winning smile, which flashed like sunlight over her face. And there were the same tones, the same quick observations, the questions, evincing her peculiar depth of thought, and the half-sadness which mingled with her most joyous moods. Yes, it was the same Margaret:—yet Mr. Sutherland looked again, and it was another; silent, almost moody, with a gloomy brow, a pallid cheek, and eyes, the lustre of which was dimmed by a gathering tear. Margaret fancied herself on the watch against betraying her unhappiness; but Mr. Sutherland was too well acquainted with her natural manner to be deceived. Before the evening was over he was as well aware as herself of the effort which her assumed gaiety cost her. It was no surprise to him that she should be depressed; but it was a disappointment that she should be so apparently overpowered. He had calculated upon strength of principle supporting her under trial, and he was grieved to perceive that it was insufficient. Mr. Sutherland had himself many anxious thoughts about the present and future prospects of the family; but they were earthly cares, and he could cast them entirely upon God. So he had hoped Margaret would have done. In one case, the most distressing of all, she had herself told him that there was much to give comfort. Illness and leisure for thought were recalling Dr. Percival's mind

from the turmoil of life, and fixing it upon the great truths, which alone are realities. Margaret had perceived symptoms of this change many weeks before, and now, as day by day the hope of her father's recovery grew less, she found in it her greatest consolation. In several letters she had mentioned it as a reason for desiring her uncle's return, for she thought her father might be at ease with him, and might be led by him to speak upon subjects which other persons would be unwilling to approach. Mr. Sutherland had hastened his journey in consequence; but Margaret's manner did not indicate satisfaction at his presence. After the first warmth of the meeting was over, she seemed rather to avoid him than not.

The following day Mr. Sutherland asked for a conversation, which might give him an insight into the state of the family affairs; and Margaret did not hesitate to tell him everything. She spoke resignedly of her father, — hopefully of Craven; she was trying to be cheerful about Agatha, and, from her observations, it was clear that her strength of mind would be sufficient to enable her to bear up against any pecuniary embarrassments. If it were necessary, she stated plainly that she would provide for herself; she would be a governess, or take pupils, or exert herself in any way that might be thought best. The consciousness of talent without its being accompanied by conceit rendered her in a degree independent of the world. Mr. Sutherland was satisfied in his expectations of Margaret's energy; but there was something in all this which did not quite please him. There was more of depression and indifference than of resignation. Except with regard to her father, Margaret in no way touched upon religion. With apparent candour there was real reserve. He tried to lead her mind to the thoughts which were a consolation to himself, and Margaret listened and agreed; but he could see that she was impatient. She did not enter into his remarks as she would once have done; and how could it be otherwise? Whilst Mr. Sutherland spoke of faith, and humility, of membership with the Church, and fellowship in suffering with Him who is its Head, Margaret was thinking of Father Andrea, and struggling against the miserable uncertainty, whether he or her uncle would be, in truth, her right guide.

The visit to the Countess the following day would, she hoped, more fully settle her mind. If Father Andrea were not likely to return soon, she determined to write to him, and entreat him to furnish her with arguments clearly put forth, which might enable her to convince Mr. Sutherland that her doubts had not been

hastily formed; and then she would tell all. That was the point upon which all her wishes were now concentrated, — to be relieved of the burden of concealment; no longer to shrink from her uncle's gaze, and tremble, like a coward, at the sound of his voice. To acknowledge everything to her father and mother, to bear their censure, their reproaches, even it might be their anguish. For Margaret could not hide from herself that the step which she was by degrees bringing herself to contemplate as possible, might be a source of greater misery to her family than any other calamity. She had before trusted that her mother would bear with the idea calmly; but as the moment of confession approached, consequences unforeseen hitherto forced themselves upon her.

Yet there would be the spirit of martrydom to support her. If she were finally to resolve upon entering the Romish Church, it would be with the certainty of having sacrificed all her family happiness for the sake of religion. The Countess's affection might in some way be a recompense; but it could not save her from great suffering. Margaret, striving after perfect sincerity of heart, endeavoured to determine everything without reference to Beatrice. The visions of happiness which she had once cherished floated before her; but they were rejected as temptations that might lead her astray; and at this point she believed herself unbiassed by any love except the love of truth. It might be so; but there was another question upon which she did not enter; by what steps of a hasty judgment, and a too vivid imagination, and a weak impatience of imperfection in the English Church, that point had been attained?

The question was to be decided sooner than was anticipated.— Late at night, when the family had retired to rest, Margaret was sitting in her room reading the life of a Romish saint: an ivory crucifix, one of the small presents she had occasionally received from the Countess, stood on the table before her.

Margaret was in general careful not to allow any signs of her secret opinions to appear; but at this hour there was no fear of interruption; and, forgetful of weariness, she continued to read until her candle had burnt low, and she suddenly awoke to the consciousness that she was no further advanced in preparing for her night's rest than when she first came to her room. A lamp was generally kept burning in the hall. Margaret stole down stairs to fetch it, fearing every moment lest the creaking of the steps, or some unlucky accident might disturb her father; and returning with the lamp, she had reached the lobby when her foot slipped over a marble which Philip had accidentally dropped,

and she fell. The lamp was extinguished, the glass broken, and on attempting to rise, Margaret found that her ankle was slightly sprained. She was vexed at her folly for having been induced to sit up; but she trusted no one had been aroused by the noise; and all that could be done was to creep back to her room as quickly and as quietly as she could. One person, however, had been disturbed. Mr. Sutherland was equally late in retiring to rest; and, before Margaret had recovered from her alarm, he came to her, begging to know if she was hurt, and insisted upon helping her to her room. Margaret laughed, and called it a trifle, and declared they should alarm the house; but she was really in pain, and Mr. Sutherland would not leave her. Margaret had no thought beyond the annoyance of the accident; she did not consider whether there was or was not any reason for objecting to her uncle's kindness; but she had no sooner entered her room than her eye rested upon the crucifix. Would he notice it? She hoped not; he was so busy with her. It did not seem likely that he would remark anything; and Mr. Sutherland did not do so to Margaret's knowledge: he waited only until he was certain she was not seriously hurt, and then bade her good night; but when he returned to his own chamber, the fact that the crucifix was standing upon the table recurred to him. It seemed strange —unlike the tastes and opinions which Margaret had sometimes expressed to him; but it was impossible that he could suspect the truth, and he went to rest without any misgiving that he had seen that which Margaret would, at almost any hazard, have then kept from him. The next morning Margaret exerted herself beyond what was prudent. Her foot was a little painful; but she knew that any complaint would be followed by an order to lie upon the sofa, and a walk to Henningsley would be out of the question. Mrs. Percival, however, perceived directly Margaret came into the breakfast-room that something was amiss. "She was lame. What was the cause of it?"

Margaret answered lightly; but Mr. Sutherland would not let the subject drop, for he was resolved that Margaret should take care of herself. The accident of the preceding night was narrated, much to Margaret's annoyance, and she found herself doomed to a day of rest. What was now to be done? To see the Countess was indispensable to her happiness: no letter would satisfy her in the same way; for Margaret, besides her wish to clear up every doubt that might yet rest on the Countess's mind, had a secret misgiving of some change, some trial that was at hand, which made her long to have an interview once more before they parted.

There was a hope that the Countess might be able to come to her, whilst Mr. Sutherland was absent in the afternoon; but this was doubtful, and might cause awkward observations. She tried to be cheerful in manner; but her spirits drooped, and Mr. Sutherland's fears, lest she was suffering, made her only the more sad. She was deceiving him, though unintentionally.

"I should scarcely have thought you would have taken a day's quiet so much to heart, Margaret," said Mrs. Percival, observing her look of passive dejection.

"It is not the rest, mamma," and Margaret forced herself to smile; "but it upsets all one's plans."

"Our walk, for instance," said Mr. Sutherland; "such as we used to have in the olden time."

Margaret could not tell what to answer; she had never intended to walk with him.

"You would have gone to Henningsley, I suppose," said Mrs. Percival, "as the Countess is to be in London so soon."

Mr. Sutherland looked up rather quickly.

"I—I don't know. The Countess is not to be away long," said Margaret, hating herself as she spoke, for her disingenuousness.

"The confessor has been absent some time, I believe," continued Mrs. Percival.

"Yes; I cannot say exactly how long," Margaret answered shortly, and then made some observations upon the weather; but she could not divert the conversation.

"I did not know the Countess Novera was here so much," said Mr. Sutherland.

"Indeed! I should have supposed, though you have had only one good correspondent, that you would have heard more than enough about her. Margaret and she are the greatest friends possible."

Margaret's confusion was not now to be hidden. Mr. Sutherland noticed it in silent wonder.

"It is quite strange, the Countess's fancy for her," persisted Mrs. Percival; "and they exchange books, and write notes, and make presents."

"Oh, mamma!" exclaimed Margaret; "the Countess scarcely ever gave me anything."—She stopped, remembering the crucifix.

"Well, my dear, I will not be quite positive about the presents; but, at any rate, you are always together, and I do not see why you should make a mystery of it. There is nothing to be ashamed of."

Mrs. Percival rose from the table, and Margaret left the room with her. Mr. Sutherland remained behind in a reverie. Something in Margaret was different,—he could not determine what. Why should she have kept back anything which interested her? He was so unsuspicious, as not even then to perceive the possible reason for her reserve, although fully aware of the Countess's religion. He thought the acquaintance undesirable, and determined to inquire more into it; but this was all. There was, however, a weight upon his spirits after the conversation, and Margaret could not help perceiving it, as he came to her when she was lying on the sofa in the school-room before luncheon. She was feeling herself guilty and miserable. Those to whom she was bound by the most sacred ties of duty and affection, she was about to involve in suffering,—how great, if her doubts were to be followed by action, she could not trust herself to think. They talked for a little while upon the family affairs; but Margaret was impatient, for an unfinished note to the Countess was before her, entreating that Beatrice would come to her that afternoon. Mr. Sutherland saw that she was not interested, although the subjects brought forward were of an all-engrossing nature.

"I am disturbing you," he said at length, when he noticed her absent manner.

"Oh, no! not at all, but I must just finish this. It must be sent to-day."

"You have time enough," said Mr. Sutherland, "if it is for the London post."

"No."—Margaret was conscious that she was blushing, and added; "it is not meant for the London post at all."

Mr. Sutherland was chilled; the answer was unlike Margaret's usual candour. At that instant a servant came into the room, and inquired if the note for Henningsley was ready.

"It would be soon, and there was a parcel to go likewise." Margaret stretched out her hand for a volume which lay near her; but it was beyond her reach. She did not ask Mr. Sutherland for it; but he took it up, and his eye rested upon the title. It was the same which Margaret had been reading the preceding evening,—the lives of Romish saints. Unsuspecting though he was, there were some coincidences which could not but attract his notice. The crucifix flashed upon his recollection. Margaret tried in vain to look unconcerned. The book was given in silence, and then she took up the pen to finish her note. Mr. Sutherland did not go away: he leaned against the mantel-piece

in a musing attitude: yet his thoughts were even then very far from the truth. He had but an increased fear that the Countess Novera might be a dangerous acquaintance, and a wish to warn Margaret gently before she was much involved.

"Is the Countess here constantly?" he said, speaking rather abruptly.

"Not constantly, but generally," was the reply, whilst Margaret still went on writing.

"And you see a great deal of her?"

"Yes,—that is, sometimes."

"Is she a nice sort of person?"

"Very;" but the answer was not hearty, for Margaret was indignant that such a question should be put concerning one whom she was accustomed to believe almost angelic in purity and goodness.

"You never said anything to me about her in your letters?"

"Yes, indeed I did, several times. I remember particularly mentioning that I stayed there a fortnight."

"What! at Henningsley?—a fortnight with the Countess Novera? Are you so intimate?" exclaimed Mr. Sutherland in a tone of the utmost surprise, not unmingled with alarm. He thought again of the crucifix and the Romish book, and a vague suspicion crossed his mind that the Countess might have been tampering with Margaret's faith, though Margaret herself might not be aware of it.

"I do not remember the fact being named," he continued; "though, of course, it must have been my oversight; but I should suppose that it would have struck me, because of what passed about Henningsley when first the Countess arrived."

"You expressed an opinion against unequal friendships," said Margaret, trying to light a taper that she might hide her confusion.

"Yes, and also upon the danger of forming an intimacy with a Romanist. That would be to me a much greater objection than the other."

Margaret was going to put up the parcel without replying; but Mr. Sutherland laid his hand upon it: "I wish, Margaret, you would not ask the Countess for such books as these."

Margaret's head was bent down: she was acting an unworthy part. Perhaps this was the best moment for the confession to be made; but Father Andrea's arguments were needed to enable her to state clearly her grounds for doubt. "The books contain a great deal that is good," she answered, "and the Countess says they have been of the utmost use to her."

"And she is not then a worldly person?"

"Worldly! oh, if you did but know her." Enthusiasm for an instant conquered prudence, and Margaret's sparkling eye and eager exclamation made Mr. Sutherland aware that the subject was near her heart. He sat down by her, and said, gravely, but affectionately, "And why, Margaret, am I to hear so little of this new friend?"

"You would not understand, nor care about her," said Margaret, finding it impossible to maintain her reserve.

"Not care for her, if you did! You would not have said that, Margaret, before I left England."

"I am not altered," replied Margaret.

Mr. Sutherland expected her to continue; but her distress became evident, and tears rolled down her cheeks. Her uncle watched her anxiously, and as she would have turned away her face, he kissed her, and said, "Margaret, you used to tell me everything."

Margaret longed to confess, but could not summon resolution. "I told you everything when you could help me," she replied; "but you cannot do so now."

"Cannot!" repeated Mr. Sutherland; "is that indeed the case?"

Margaret closed her eyes, and prayed that strength might be given her. "If I have a secret," she said at length, "it can do you no good to know it before the time. Sorrow will come soon enough."

"Suspense, Margaret, is the keenest suffering."

Margaret knew this but too well. If she could only bring herself to own the truth, every after trial would be tolerable. "And you would love me always, through everything?" she said, clasping her uncle's hand. Then as she saw the sudden paleness which overspread his face, she started up and exclaimed—"Yes, I knew, I said it would be worst with you."

"Margaret," replied Mr. Sutherland, recovering himself, "if you have erred in any way, I am the person to whom, next to your parents, you are bound to make the confession."

"It is not error," said Margaret, firmly: "it is truth; but I am too ignorant to convince you of it." She raised her eyes to his, and her heart beat violently. What she then most earnestly desired was, that he might guess all that she would say; and Mr. Sutherland had a doubt, though the reality was too startling to be at once admitted into his mind. "If you could bear with me," continued Margaret, in a rapid tone, seeing that he did not speak.

"You would, if you knew my wretchedness. I have had no one to consult, and I have prayed to be guided aright. Only bear with me; do not turn away from me and hate me, though I may make you miserable for a time. Father Andrea has said that happiness will come to us all, if we follow the truth." Margaret pronounced the confessor's name, and Mr. Sutherland's eyes were opened. The fearful agitation of his mind was betrayed by his countenance; but his voice, though low, was unshaken.

"Margaret, my poor child!" he said, as he placed his hand fondly upon her throbbing temples, "have they really been filling your mind with doubts?"

Margaret answered by leaning her head upon his shoulder, and crying bitterly.

"I did not seek it," she said, in a broken voice; "they did not try to teach me; but it has all come upon me by degrees. You must not think hardly of them, they are so good."

"And they have been talking to you, persuading you that they are right?" inquired Mr. Sutherland, impatient to ascertain whether the evil were more than a lately infused suspicion acting upon a tender conscience.

"Yes, showing me,—proving it. They are saints,—so much, much better than I am."

"Let them be who or what they may," exclaimed Mr. Sutherland, sternly, "they have done an evil work; but, Margaret, you must not hide anything from me now. Tell me what it is they have taught you to believe."

"The English Church is not the true Church," said Margaret, speaking with difficulty; "indeed, it is not. It is wrong in so many ways; you may be safe, for you have faith in it, but I cannot be."

Mr. Sutherland passed his hand before his eyes. Grief and indignation struggled in his breast; yet he strove against the latter, for it might be unjust. "And how long, Margaret, has this been going on?" he said. "When did they first begin to tamper with you?"

"I do not know; I can fix upon no time, though I have often tried. It has come gradually. Beatrice said but little to me at first; but I saw that she was unlike the world, and I loved her dearly. I felt myself inferior, and I saw it was religion which made her different."

"And you began, then, to inquire into her principles?"

"Sometimes. There was nothing to help me in the English Church. I seemed left to myself, and now and then I said so;

and Beatrice told me more about her own Church, and explained things to me which had puzzled me; and Father Andrea was always saying that ours was an Act of Parliament Church. And when I declared it was not, he pointed out to me how the State interfered with it, and proved that it had no power in itself, and many things besides; and at last he convinced me. But it was my own will: he never forced the subject. I do not think he at all intended to make me change when he began."

A bitter smile passed over Mr. Sutherland's face; but the feeling which caused it was mastered in a moment. He endeavoured to forget Father Andrea, and think only of Margaret. "And all this time had you no thought that you were doing wrong?" he said, very gravely.

"There can be nothing wrong in searching after truth," replied Margaret, evading the question.

"But there may be in the manner of searching. The man who, upon the first impulse of disloyalty to his king, from a dissatisfaction with his government, throws himself into the enemy's camp, and parleys with foreign chiefs, is a traitor. Margaret, we may be traitors to our Church."

Margaret looked extremely hurt, and said, "I thought you would be grieved, not angry."

"It is not anger," replied Mr. Sutherland, "God knows! But when doubts arose, had you no friend in whom you could confide? Was your uncle so entirely forgotten? and were there no guides in the English Church? Could you not recall the names of any saintly and learned men, Jewell, Sanderson, Hammond, Bull, Hooker, Jeremy Taylor,—hundreds who have studied the question thoroughly, and proved that the claims of Rome are unfounded?"

"I cannot tell—I do not understand," said Margaret, in a faltering voice; "I was carried on without thought; but the end has been that my eyes have been opened, and I know that the salvation of my soul is at stake."

Mr. Sutherland walked the room quickly.

"Of all persons," continued Margaret, with greater firmness, "you would be the last to counsel me against my conscience. That alone I must follow; and, come what may, I must abide the trial in patience."

As Margaret spoke, Mr. Sutherland's face became rigid in the effort to retain self-command; but when she paused he sank into a chair, and covered his face with his hands. Margaret could not be aware of the impression in his mind that the final step had

been taken, and that her confession was intended to prepare him for the fact; but she saw the anguish which he was suffering, and she knew that the tears which his own griefs could never have extracted, were now shed for her. She sat trembling and silent, not venturing to explain herself further.

"Have I heard the worst?" he said at length, looking up, and speaking in a changed, and scarcely audible tone. Margaret was frightened, and did not immediately answer; and the doubt became agony. "Speak, Margaret, speak! are you a Romanist?"

The question startled, almost shocked Margaret.

"Oh no! — impossible! — how could it be, unknown to you?"

"Thank God! then there is still hope."

He seemed relieved from the immediate pressure of alarm, and his countenance resumed its wonted expression; but he was very pale, and Margaret noticed that his voice was faltering.

"I must be alone," he said, moving to leave the room; "I thought myself stronger than I am; but we will renew the subject by and by, and you must give me a patient hearing."

Margaret drew near, to ask his forgiveness for the pain she had caused. He put his hand upon her head—"God's blessing and pardon be with you, my child! you were never in greater need of them." He was going; but his eye glanced upon the parcel for the Countess, and he stopped, "Margaret, you were to have seen the Countess Novera to-day?"

"Yes, here; I could not go to her."

"But it must not be. There must be no interview with her; if not for your own sake, for mine."

A blank fell upon Margaret's heart. "Ask me anything but that. To-morrow Beatrice will be far away."

"To-morrow will be too late. The duty of the present moment is all that is ours."

"But for one hour—it can neither add to, nor take from my conviction."

Mr. Sutherland's face again betokened intensity of fear and suspense. "Margaret," he said, in an accent of sad reproach, "is your love for a stranger stronger than your love for me? But it is not for myself,—it is the love of truth, of the Church; it is the love of God, who is Himself Truth, which requires it."

"Truth!" repeated Margaret; "the Countess may know more of it than we do."

"Be it so," replied her uncle; "let her be gifted as an angel from heaven, for you there is but one duty. You have thrown

yourself into the hands of Romanists; before it is too late, you must hearken to the teaching of your own Church."

"I only wish," said Margaret, struggling to be calm, "to see her once more before she leaves Henningsley. There is a heavy sense of coming evil upon my spirits. You can little tell how wretched I must be without it."

Deep affection and pity were in the tone of Mr. Sutherland's reply, but his words were imperative as before. "My dear, dear child, if there were any other way,—if it were not a question of such unutterable importance!—but you are blinded, you cannot see your danger: Follow your own will, and may Heaven avert the consequences!"

Margaret could not resist the earnestness of his manner. She tried to collect her thoughts; but it was not in her power. Mr. Sutherland awaited her decision patiently, and, after a great struggle, it was given.

"I put myself into your hands, but for the present only. I must think whether you are right hereafter."

Her hand shook as she seated herself at her desk, and wrote a few short lines explaining the reasons which detained her at home, but expressing no wish to see the Countess before she set off for London. "Let it be kept till late," she said, hurriedly, "and there will be no fear. Beatrice is now expecting me."

Mr. Sutherland thanked her, and once more blessed her fervently; but Margaret was too miserable to be comforted. She hid her face from the light, and when her uncle left her, intreated, as the only favour which could now be granted, that he would persuade her mother to leave her undisturbed in her own chamber for the next few hours.

CHAPTER LX.

THE Countess Novera had even less satisfaction than Margaret, in reflecting upon what had passed between them. If she had been alive to suspicion before, she was not less so now. Mystery there still appeared to be; reserve where affection, in the Countess's opinion, required there should be none. Lucia's hateful insinuations returned again and again. They were rejected by the Countess's generous nature; but they could not be quite repelled. Margaret had not entered fully into her sister's case; she had not

expressed herself as strongly as Beatrice herself would have done; she had only once alluded to her uncle, and when the Countess had confided to her the vow which bound her to dispose of her property according to strict limitations, Margaret's manner had suddenly and unaccountably changed. All these were symptoms from which a prejudiced mind might draw an unfavourable conclusion; and Beatrice was not free from prejudice. Distrust had long been working in her mind; and now, aided by the impetuosity of her temper, and the exacting nature of her affection, it succeeded in warping her judgment. Pride made her strive to conceal the effect which the interview had produced; but Lucia was too keen-sighted not to discover it. The Countess appeared in the drawing-room in the afternoon, and Lucia proposed reading aloud, but Beatrice could not attend. She took up her work, and then threw it aside; turned over her portfolio; but, as she caught sight of Margaret's sketch for the school-house, closed it with a heavy sigh. By degrees a flush gathered upon her cheek, and her temples began to throb, and by the time the evening had closed in, it was very evident that she was suffering from an attack of fever. Lucia was really anxious, and persuaded her to go to bed. She would willingly have remained herself in the room to watch till she was asleep, but Beatrice could scarcely endure her presence. In the agitation of her spirits,—weak, both physically and mentally,—she fancied that if Lucia were away, her mind would again sink into repose. It was the consciousness of her jealousy, she thought, of her moodiness and discontent, which was oppressive. Alone, she could be happy; but in solitude came the doubt of Margaret's truth and love, and Beatrice tossed from side to side during the weary hours of the long night, seeking for that confidence in human affection which, if deceived in Margaret, she imagined she could never again expect to enjoy. The next day was one of weakness and irritation; the mind acting upon the body, and the body unfitting the mind for self-command. But the Countess refused every suggestion of medical advice, and remained by herself the whole morning. Lucia was conscious that she was wretched, and it grieved her; for the love which she professed was sincere, though selfish. But she could bear to see Beatrice suffer now, in the hope that, when once this English affection were subdued, her own place in the Countess's heart would be restored. The hope, however, had no foundation. A capricious temper which disturbs the equanimity of our home life is less endurable than many more serious faults; and Beatrice wrote to Father Andrea before she left her room, to urge upon him the necessity of providing for

Lucia's return: with, or against her consent, there would now be no question. The morrow came. There is almost always a hope of something happier or better in a new day, and Beatrice, after a few hours' sleep, rose more refreshed than she had anticipated, and more inclined to look favourably upon the world, whilst reproaching herself for her injustice towards Margaret. The morning was occupied in preparations for the journey to London, and care for some of the poor people; and in the afternoon, Margaret was to be with her again. Beatrice, upon consideration, settled in her own mind that it would be wise to do away with all doubt, by being more unreserved herself. She might, in this way, overcome Margaret's shyness, if it were nothing more; and, by clearing up every seeming cause of distrust, convince Lucia that she had been speaking under a wrong impression. Hope was again uppermost in her mind, and there was a bright cheerfulness in her countenance, as she sat in her boudoir, awaiting Margaret's arrival, and employing herself in finishing a purse which was to be given her before they parted. But the minutes and half-hours wore away, and no Margaret came. Lucia knocked at the door once or twice under pretence of wishing to speak with her, but in reality to see whether she was alone. She made no observation at first; but when it grew late in the afternoon, and the Countess started at her entrance, and stepped forward as if expecting to meet some one she loved, and then sunk back on the sofa disappointedly, Lucia's face expressed inward satisfaction, as she remarked, — "Miss Percival is late this afternoon; she must have been particularly engaged, not to be here this last day."

"She has been detained; she will come," said the Countess; and there was no doubt in her tone, though there was in Lucia's smile.

"I am going for a walk in the park, probably I shall meet Miss Percival," said Lucia, entering the room again, as the time-piece struck half after four.

"Yes, you may — I dare say you will, for she must be here soon;" but the certainty was not as great as before; and, when Lucia was gone, the Countess stood at the window with the natural credulity of impatience, the fond persuasion that by looking she could hasten Margaret's movements. Lucia went for her solitary walk tolerably well satisfied. She was nearly certain, from the Countess's manner on the previous day, that the interview with Margaret had not thoroughly pleased her. Perhaps they had differed; and Margaret's absence might be the consequence of resentment. Lucia wished Margaret no evil, at least not what

she would have called evil, but the thought that this might have been the case, was a salve to her jealousy, which made her spirits rise. She saw no signs of Margaret, and heard nothing of her from the labourers or at the Lodge; and when she returned to the house, the Countess was watching disconsolately the deepening shades of evening, grieving and wondering still over Margaret's absence.

"No Miss Percival yet?" said Lucia, in a pitying, yet slightly sarcastic tone: "then she will not come at all."

"Her father must be worse, I fear," said the Countess; "but in that case she would have written."

"Yes, or sent word: it has never happened before, I think."

"Never; there must be some great cause for it, I am sure."

"And you so unwell, and going away," added Lucia: "it is extremely strange." She hoped to find out from the Countess's manner whether her suspicions were correct, and they had parted in anger; but Beatrice evinced nothing but eagerness, and said, that if she did not hear soon, she should send to inquire the cause; "Dr. Percival was in such a very precarious state, he might be very much worse."

"How dreadful for his family!" observed Lucia.

"Yes; poor Margaret!" the Countess gave a deep sigh, and added in an under voice—"few persons can have more to make them unhappy."

"Miss Percival looked ill yesterday," said Lucia.

"Did you think so?" asked Beatrice, in an anxious tone. "When did you see her?"

"I met her in the hall just as she arrived. It struck me particularly, because in general she seems much better and happier when she is here."

The Countess mused for a few moments, and then said, "It is strange, very strange, indeed! I think I must send."

Lucia did not offer to ring the bell, for she was angry at the Countess's uneasiness.

"Miss Percival has reason to be fond of Henningsley," she said; "she will find no such confidence elsewhere."

"Perhaps not," replied Beatrice, with dignity, "for there can be few persons who know as well as I do how truly she deserves it."

She moved away from the window, intending to put a stop to the conversation; but her eye rested for an instant upon Lucia's incredulous face; and it brought anew to her recollection the taunt with which a former conversation had concluded; the

warning to test Margaret's disinterestedness. How willingly would she have proved to Lucia that her words had been an unfounded calumny! But Margaret's cold abstracted manner, the change which had so suddenly come over her, made her pause,—she must wait and see Margaret once more before she could venture to own to Lucia that the test had been applied. It could not be that Lucia was right, and that Margaret's affection was but a mask for selfish objects; but it was not yet possible to prove that she was wrong.

The lingering twilight died away, the last line of golden light faded into a misty grey, and the crescent moon shone cloudless in the dark heavens. Then the Countess's hope was over. Margaret could not come. Lucia had left her, and she was alone. She no longer doubted that it would be well to write; but the comfort which she could have found in the occupation was over. Suspicion was again busy with its whispers. The Countess ordered a lamp, sent word to Lucia that she would join her in the drawing-room, but that she could not then be interrupted, and sat down to her writing-table. The first words were scarcely begun, when her solitude was disturbed. A note had just been brought from the Grove. It was seized with greater agitation than the occasion demanded, for suspense had roused the excitable spirit of the Countess, and illness had caused a feverish eagerness. She tore open the seal, read the few hasty lines, colder far than Margaret's wonted expressions, from the tumult of agitation in which they had been penned, and, casting it from her indignantly, without attempt at reason or extenuation, yielded to the belief that the affection in which she had confided was but a phantom of her own creation.

CHAPTER LXI.

THE wretchedness of the solitary hours which followed Margaret's confession to Mr. Sutherland cannot be described in words. They alone can fully understand it who have borne the terrible uprooting of the simple faith of their childhood; the loss of that spirit of trust, it may in some cases be credulity, which rests upon those by whom it has been taught; thinks with their thoughts, as it worships in their forms; and casts itself without a care upon the turbulent ocean of life, secure, that whilst clinging

to the same plank with them, the waves can never overwhelm it. That trust had, indeed, long since in Margaret's case been shaken; but it had lived in a new form. The Countess and Father Andrea had been her guides instead of Mr. Sutherland. There was still the same reliance upon the judgment of others; and, though Margaret had often endured the misery of doubt, nothing which she had hitherto experienced could be compared to the present trial. Whilst Mr. Sutherland was away, the balance was decidedly in favour of the Countess; and Margaret was willing to trust to her direction, and bow to her opinions, and to those of the confessor. But Mr. Sutherland had returned, and his former influence revived. Margaret could not be in his presence without being sensible of it. So holy, elevated, simple, earnest in all his thoughts and actions, it seemed that she had never done him justice before. But if his belief were true, the belief of Father Andrea and Beatrice must be erroneous. Margaret knew now by bitter experience the instability of any faith which is founded upon, or even in any great degree supported by reverence for a human guide alone. In the hour of trial it gave way. If both might be the messengers of truth, both might be also the teachers of error; and if so,—they were awful moments which ensued, moments when religion and hope vanished from before her. Earth in its beauty became a scene of dreary nothingness; the sky an impenetrable barrier; the sun a mocking, glittering mystery; and through the dark regions of the future, and the unfathomable abysses of the past, the blinded, helpless, sin-defiled spirit, wandered without light, or guide, or aim, knowing neither whence it had come, nor whither it was bound, whilst shrinking from the thought of annihilation by the imperishable instinct of its nature.

Margaret knelt in the attitude of prayer; but the soul of prayer was dead. Yet there was an Eye of Mercy that watched untiring over an erring child; an Arm of Mercy stretched out to help her in her need; and, when in agony she pressed her hand to her forehead to still the tumult of her brain, and firmly closed her eyelids to shut out the gaudy distracting light of day, the mystery of her own being brought back to her mind the first faint ray of light to illume the darkness of scepticism. The soul, thirsting for perfection, stamped with the impress of infinity and eternity, was in itself a witness to its divine origin. Degraded it might be; ruined, earth-bound; but that which could, even faintly, and at an immeasurable distance, comprehend the idea of God, must originally have come from God. Man cannot enter into the life of the brute creation; the brute creation cannot, we believe, reach

upwards to the spirit of man. The two natures seem to be in themselves essentially different; but the little child kneeling at its mother's knee looks above into the vast blue sky, and grasps, as it were, the presence of an omnipotent, omnipresent Deity, and in its short and simple prayers gives testimony to the truth of revelation, which tells us that "in the image of God created He man." With the knowledge of an Almighty Being came the sense of holiness, mercy, love; the truths of Christianity rushed in an instant upon Margaret's mind; whilst a voice, the memory of well-known words, whispered gently to her heart, "Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Is such a voice the echo of early association, or the breathing of a ministering angel, or more—the immediate inspiration of the Spirit of God? Margaret felt that it was from heaven, and the cloud of darkness passed away, whilst she prayed long and fervently. Truth she knew must exist, and, if sought for humbly and in faith, would assuredly be found. The two requisites were indispensably connected. Perhaps the defect hitherto, though she did not then perceive it, had been, that humility—the willingness to obey an authority set over her, although it did not entirely accord with her own ideas—had been wanting.

But before Margaret could receive any further advice from her uncle, she was compelled to join the family; to walk with Agatha, whose spirits and health were giving way under grief and disappointment; to read to her father; and to listen to her mother's recapitulation of a conversation which had that morning passed between herself and Dr. Percival, as to the possibility of any longer keeping George at College. Margaret did all that was required of her tolerably well. She dared not think of herself again. The horrible scepticism might return at any moment. The one great subject must be kept until she could see her uncle alone; but there was another which would not be banished, and Margaret thought of the Countess Novera with a sickening miserable fear that the end of their happiness was at hand, and with a vague hope that from some unforeseen circumstance they might meet before the day was over. But as the Countess waited in suspense for Margaret, so Margaret waited in vain for the Countess. Night came at last for both; but to Beatrice it brought the yearnings of a desolate heart for the comfort of human affection: to Margaret the determination that, before she lay down to rest, her mind should be fully made up as to the course which she was henceforth to adopt. If Mr. Sutherland's arguments

were, as she fully imagined they would be, unconvincing, she would openly avow her sentiments, risk the possible consequences, and put herself under the immediate guidance of Father Andrea.

Mr. Sutherland had kept his room during the greater part of the day. He was suffering more than Margaret supposed; for he had received a great shock, and his strength was as yet but imperfectly restored. He saw clearly the imminent danger to which Margaret would be exposed if she once allowed herself to believe that the change of religion was a question of conscience and feeling only. At an advanced stage of conviction, conscience, though perverted, and feeling, become our almost necessary guides, and this stage it was possible that she might have reached. The time for reasoning is before we have approached near enough to the forbidden fruit to look at it and admire. Twelve months before Margaret could, from her own knowledge, have refuted many of the errors of Romanism. Now, she might reason; but the fear was lest reason should have lost its power.

"Are you going to the library?" said Margaret to her uncle, as Mrs. Percival left the room soon after tea.

"I was thinking of it; but would you rather I should stay?"

Margaret was inclined to say "No;" she dreaded, though she longed for, the subject to be renewed.

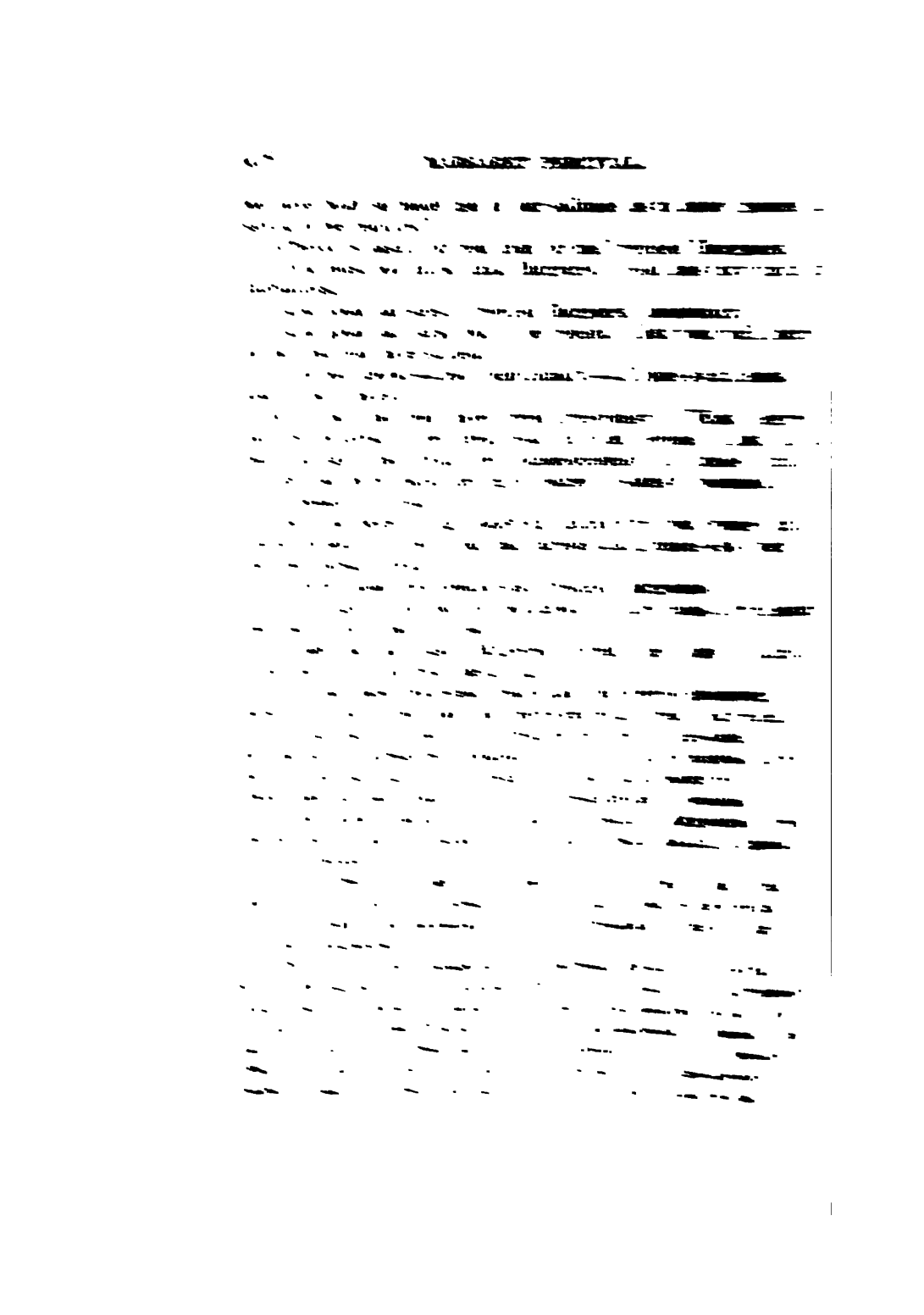
"I should like to talk to you for a few minutes," she said: "but I will follow you. I must go to my father first."

Mr. Sutherland was tired, and well aware that a few minutes would not be sufficient to undo the work of months; but he could not ask Margaret to delay. The subject was too important and engrossing for them both.

And so once again Margaret found herself at the same hour, in the same place, and with the same person, from whom, comparatively but a short time previous, she had received her first notions of the authority and discipline of the English Church. How all was changed since then! abroad and at home, in the affairs of her family, and in that inner circle of her own existence, where lay the well-spring of her happiness. The same idea was probably in Mr. Sutherland's mind, as he placed a chair for her at the table, and said, "Times are changed since you and I, Margaret, conversed together in this room."

Margaret could not sit down, for she was too much agitated.

"We must discuss this matter calmly, my dear child," said Mr. Sutherland; "it is one which above all others requires feeling to be subdued, and reason to be exerted; and I hope and believe that



the law of the primitive Church. In all these instances, the result must be unsatisfactory (I am supposing, of course, the case of an intelligent, cultivated mind making the inquiry); and then the decision would be—'if the religion which I have been taught has not external proof to support it, I am at liberty to seek the truth elsewhere.'"

"That is hard to understand," said Margaret.

"But it is, in fact, a simple rule. If the claims of another religion are brought before you, do not examine into it at once, but go back and see what are the claims of your own. And, observe, we act upon this constantly. Who is there (taking people in general) that gives himself the trouble of asking the creed of all the different sects which we see springing up? Or how many persons, do you think, know the true history of Mahometanism?"

"Very few, of course."

"Very few, indeed; and there is no occasion to know. We are assured that Christianity is true, and that is sufficient for us. Two religions equally true cannot exist at the same time."

"And what books should I have read? How should I have inquired?"

"You should not have begun with reading. It would be beyond you. You are a woman, and very young. Your education has been good, but not learned; and the claims of the English Church can only be thoroughly understood by persons who have studied. Clergymen are the appointed teachers in such cases. Was there no clergyman, Margaret, who would have been willing and anxious to settle your mind?"

He looked at her reproachfully; and Margaret's heart smote her for the mistake,—rather, perhaps, the fault,—which she had committed in the reserve which she had practised.

"Yes, I was wrong there," she said, in a low voice; "but I was afraid, for several reasons."

"And the fear might have taught you your danger. If you had applied to me upon the first doubt, you might have saved us both from misery."

"Misery!" said Margaret.

"Yes, misery. The moment when I thought that you might already have taken the final step, was utter misery. Thank God, it was not lasting."

"But surely, surely," exclaimed Margaret, remembering that the religion which her uncle appeared so much to dread was the religion of Beatrice and Father Andrea, "to change from one Church to another cannot be like an apostasy from Christianity?"

"It involves the possibility of a sin, from which we pray constantly to be delivered; that sin which is numbered with sedition, rebellion, hardness of heart, and the contempt of God's commandments,—the sin of schism."

"I did not think so," replied Margaret.

Mr. Sutherland looked at her gravely, and said,—"Oh, Margaret! ought you not to have thought so? Is the man who steals guiltless, because he did not think, or, more truly, did not remember that stealing is forbidden?"

"Romanism is Christianity," replied Margaret. "Yes," she added, her eye kindling with animation, "a holy, pure, elevated Christianity."

Mr. Sutherland stopped her: "Nay, Margaret; I can listen to no such praise. The persons whom you have known may be holy, pure, and elevated; but not their creed, for it is not in accordance with the Bible. This you must have seen at the beginning; and it ought to have alarmed you."

"It did," replied Margaret; "but after conversing with the Countess or Father Andrea, the difficulties became less."

There was a slight expression of impatience in Mr. Sutherland's tone as he answered,—

"And so it may really have been. The popular prejudices against Romanism are often exaggerated and unfounded; yet the two Churches must ever remain distinct. No man can hold the doctrines of the Church of Rome and the doctrines of the Church of England together."

"Father Andrea would tell me that," replied Margaret.

"And he is right, quite right; there can be no compromise. The question is, which are the true doctrines?"

"There has seemed but little doubt when I have conversed with Father Andrea," said Margaret, in faltering accents.

"I am not going to combat the confessor's arguments," observed Mr. Sutherland; "and I have no wish to hear them."

Margaret looked at him in great surprise.

"They are nothing to me," he continued; "at least, as far as you are concerned. It would be a waste of words to disprove each separate error of Romanism."

"Then there is no hope," said Margaret, with a little tone of asperity; but the hasty feeling was only momentary; and she added, immediately,

"You cannot mean to be unkind?"

"Not for the world. It would be most cruel to add one instant of sorrow to those which you have to bear; but until we have

destroyed the main spring of error, there is little gained by attacking the minor evils."

"I cannot comprehend you," replied Margaret, impatiently; "Father Andrea's language is clear, and very different."

"It shall not be clearer in the end," answered Mr. Sutherland, with perfect gentleness; "but, I fear, you are not prepared for cool reasoning, and yet I cannot, and will not, use any other mode of convincing you that you are wrong."

"I am prepared for anything which shall give me rest," said Margaret.

Mr. Sutherland regarded her with the deepest compassion. The face, once full of animation and cheerfulness, was now marked by traces of long and wearying thought.

"Give me, then, your full attention, my dear Margaret," he said, "as to a question involving interests far beyond this world. I have prayed that I may be able to set it clearly before you, and I have a full trust that my prayer will be granted."

Margaret's eager manner was subdued, but she did not ask him to go on.

"You probably expect," continued Mr. Sutherland, "that I am going to bring forward the common arguments against the worship of the Virgin, the doctrines of indulgences, purgatory, the invocation of saints, and others like them; and I might do so easily: but the result would be, that the next time you met Father Andrea, or any other clever Romanist, he might do away with all I had said in two ways; either he might modify, and palliate, and draw nice distinctions, so as entirely to mystify you as to the real doctrines of the Romish Church; or he might say that the Romish Church is the only true Church, therefore, infallible, — therefore not to be disputed in anything which she may decree concerning matters of faith."

"Father Andrea does say this," replied Margaret; "he declares that we have cut ourselves off from the true Church; that we are governed by acts of parliament; that our sacraments are invalid, and our doctrines heretical; and he points to the working of our Church as a proof of its inefficiency."

"Exactly what I expected to hear," replied Mr. Sutherland; "and, observe, if these statements are proved to be false, the question as to the other points upon which Rome condemns us cannot concern you. As a baptised member of the English Church, you are bound to abide in her communion."

"I would rather Father Andrea were here to answer you, than for me to attempt it," said Margaret.

"You will find nothing beyond your comprehension," replied her uncle. Let me ask you a few questions. You say that the English Church is an act of parliament Church. How can that be, when its very essence consists in an apostolic ministry, a succession derived from the primitive Church?"

"But the State does interfere very much?" said Margaret.

"Yes, very much; so much as to make one tremble for the existence of the Church, as the national religion. But can an act of parliament make void episcopal ordination?"

"No; yet it may prevent a bishop from exercising his functions."

"Assuredly it may. You may bind a man's hands, and laugh at him for his helplessness, but that does not destroy the hands themselves. The problem is clearly solved in the case of the Scotch Church. An act of parliament annihilated it, as far as could be done; but the Scotch Church lives, and flourishes, and must continue to do so. Such would be the case also with the English Church, if the State were to disown her."

"But if we are not in communion with the true Church, all this is nothing," said Margaret.

"Granted entirely—if we are not; but here you enter upon a totally different subject. What is it constitutes a true Church?"

"Father Andrea would say that no Church can be a true Church which does not submit to the visible head, the universal bishop," answered Margaret.

"Yes, he must say so. But who constituted the Bishop of Rome the universal bishop?"

"He was always acknowledged to be so until the Reformation."

Mr. Sutherland half smiled. "It is a curious fact," he said, "that the ancient British Church should have been quite independent of Rome, and that the whole of the Eastern Church should from the very earliest ages have set aside the claim. But, Margaret, Father Andrea says one thing, and I say another: which do you intend to believe?"

"Father Andrea has the Church for fifteen centuries with him," replied Margaret.

"That, begging your pardon, I utterly deny. Father Andrea has the early Church entirely against him."

"How can this be proved?"

"Rather, how can you prove that it is not so? For a member of the English Church—the burden of proof lies on the side of Rome."

"We are reasoning at a disadvantage," said Margaret, looking extremely unhappy. "I have no learning to confute you, but Father Andrea has."

"Still that cannot help you. His learning may be of use to him; but when we both stand before you, mine must have an equal weight. You cannot leave the Church of your fathers because you choose to believe Father Andrea rather than me. Margaret, what are you to do?"

Margaret was evidently perplexed. "If I were not so ignorant," she began—"but Father Andrea has no doubt, and supports his belief by constant appeals to the early writers."

"All which have been again and again disproved by the divines of the English Church. And for confidence, as truly as I believe that there is a God in heaven, so truly do I believe that the English Church is a true branch of the Catholic Church."

Margaret was much struck by the solemnity of the assertion, but she was unwilling to acknowledge it.

"Listen to me Margaret," continued Mr. Sutherland, earnestly. "An act of parliament Church the English Church cannot be, because she has the gift of the apostolical succession. Heretical she cannot be, because she holds the creed of the apostles, and the canons of the first four general councils. Schismatical she cannot be, unless the claim of the Bishop of Rome to be the universal bishop is proved to be valid. Now, before you can attempt to form an opinion for yourself upon this point, I will tell you the learning which is absolutely required. First, an acquaintance with the works of the great English divines—Taylor, Andrews, Hooker, Hammond, Bull, Beveridge, and very many besides. Next, a comparison of their statements with those of Bellarmine, Baronius, and the chief Romanist writers. Then a perfect knowledge of ecclesiastical history, without which you cannot decide as to the credibility of the facts brought forward. And, lastly, a long and deep study of the early fathers, implying, of course, critical learning in the Greek and Latin languages."

Margaret mused for a few moments, and then said, "I do not see how this can be. The question of the papal supremacy cannot be so very intricate."

"It would not be intricate if you were wishing merely to confirm your faith in the English Church. I would then put a few plain facts before you, which must at once be conclusive. But if you mean to decide for yourself, you are bound in justice

to both Churches to provide yourself with the requisite amount of learning."

"And are you sure that the papal supremacy is the only point to be considered?"

"It cannot be otherwise where a Church possesses the apostolical succession, and holds to the creed of the apostles, and the canons of the first four general councils. Nothing but the doctrine of the Papal Supremacy can invalidate our orders, or sanction our excommunication, or oblige us to accept the creed of Pope Pius as well as that of the apostles."

"But," replied Margaret, "you have said nothing of the inefficiency of the English Church, its neglect of discipline, and its internal divisions, and its want of provision for the poor."

"The American Church, Margaret, is in some respects a more effective Church than ours. She has lately made great missionary exertions. Suppose an American bishop were to settle himself in England, and claim your allegiance for that reason, what should you say?"

"You do not deny the accusation, though?" said Margaret, evading a reply.

"If I do not, it is because I feel its truth in my own breast, and would humble myself daily and hourly before God, for the share which I have had in bringing the Church of my country, the holy, pure, apostolic Church of England into disesteem."

Margaret was not prepared with an immediate objection to this answer; but at length, with an air of the deepest mental distress, she said, "This may all be true; I can bring nothing at the present moment against it; but it gives me no certainty. Such reasoning would, if I were born a Romanist, keep me one."

"As far as we have yet gone, my love, undoubtedly it would. Your ignorance would be as conclusive against a change of religion in the one case as the other."

"Then it must be dark, all dark, even to the end," said Margaret, in a voice of despair. "I can never know from my own persuasion that the doctrines of Rome are indeed false."

"No, Margaret: far from it. God has given 'a lantern unto your feet, and a light unto your path.' He has put the Bible into your hands, and when you wish for a confirmation of the truth of your Church you have but to open it and read."

"And we are then at last thrown back upon our own judgment!" exclaimed Margaret; "so that truth is, as Dissenters would say, that which every one can discover for himself from the Bible."

"Stay, Margaret, that is a hasty decision. I, as a clergyman

of the English branch of the Catholic Church, come before you with a statement of her doctrines. As a proof that these doctrines are true, I confirm them by the inspired Word of God. A Dissenter comes to you without authority; he puts the Bible into your hands, and says, 'Discover its doctrines for yourself.' A Romanist says, 'You are very ignorant, and you must believe what I tell you: if my doctrines accord with the Bible, well and good; if not, still you must believe, because the Romish Church asserts that it is so.' The three cases are totally distinct, and if the doctrines of the English Church could not be proved by the Bible we should be bound to seek for that faith which could be."

Margaret rested her head upon her hand, and was lost in thought. Mr. Sutherland did not interrupt her; but a prayer that she might be directed in this her hour of need arose from his inmost heart, as he saw reason to hope that the mists which had clouded her judgment might eventually be dispersed.

"And the Romanist in a foreign country must then either give up the Church or the Bible?" said Margaret, again renewing the conversation.

"That is a question upon which I cannot now enter," replied her uncle. "It is one which does not in the slightest degree alter your duty. Cast aside every consideration but that which immediately concerns yourself, for there is no safety for you else."

Mr. Sutherland spoke solemnly, and Margaret could not conceal her agitation. "It is late," she said, rising suddenly: "we have been talking a long time."

Mr. Sutherland was not satisfied with her manner, and, retaining her hand, said, "We cannot part in this way, Margaret."

"If Father Andrea were but with us! if you could hear him!" she exclaimed.

"Father Andrea is but a human being. Let him be good and learned as he may, he has no power over truth. Margaret, are you in any way more satisfied?"

"I do not know,—I must think," replied Margaret, greatly distressed.

"But, my dear child, answer me this one question. If you think, and afterwards decide contrary to my advice, upon whose judgment must you act?"

"Upon my own, undoubtedly."

"And yet you acknowledge that you have not the means of forming a correct judgment; whom then will you consult—Father Andrea?"

Margaret could not answer "No."

"Will not that be wilfulness, Margaret?" said Mr. Sutherland, sternly. He had never spoken so before, and she trembled. "Wilfulness," he continued, "which cannot be guiltless in the sight of God."

"In pity, do not speak so harshly to me," exclaimed Margaret, overcome by a sudden sense of desertion.

Mr. Sutherland's manner softened instantly; but his voice was still most solemn as he said, "My own Margaret, if God would vouchsafe to open your eyes, to show you your snare, the peril of your soul's salvation!"

"God will have mercy upon a weak conscience," said Margaret, faintly.

"God will have mercy upon a conscience which has never been warned; but when the warning has been given, our guilt must be upon our own heads. If my words have now carried conviction with them, the course you must adopt is clear. Romanism, under whatever form it tempts you, books, or friends, even things which seem in themselves holy and pure, must be given up."

"I would hear the arguments again," said Margaret, forcibly repelling the idea of the sacrifice which the words implied.

"You can scarcely require that. You have but to remember that the English Church claims to be a true Church; that her claims can only be set aside by admitting the supremacy of the Bishop of Rome; that the fact of this supremacy is utterly beyond your own investigation, and has been again and again refuted by English divines; and that to adopt the opinion of Father Andrea or any other person against theirs is a wilful turning aside from the guides whom God has appointed you to follow. And above all, Margaret, read your Bible, and pray with your Prayer-book, and keep a careful watch over a criticising, discontented spirit, and you will never become a Romanist."

Mr. Sutherland stopped, hoping that Margaret would say something which might show that his words were not thrown away. There seemed still, however, to be difficulties rankling in her mind, and her reply was, "Doubts will come continually."

"Most certainly they will; but I will give you two rules for dealing with them. At the moment they arise do not attempt to argue against them. Crush them as you would a sceptical or infidel doubt."

"And how?"

"By making what I might almost call a physical effort against them. Let your first help be prayer, very short; it can scarcely be too short, if it is earnest. Afterwards, repeat verses, walk

about, read, sing, do anything which shall be actual occupation for the moment. Every one knows what an incipient thought is; in that stage it may be kept down with comparatively little effort. Then, do not trouble yourself at any time with more arguments than are necessary. Your own ignorance, the duty of remaining where God has placed you, unless you have absolute demonstration, which you never can have, that the English Church is no true Church; and the entire accordance of the Bible and the Prayer-book will be sufficient. Try these in any way you please: they cannot be controverted; and until they are controverted Romanism can be nothing to you."

"I shall seem to be resisting truth," said Margaret.

"Yes, there will be your great difficulty. Sceptical thoughts we know at once to be wrong; these, on the contrary, will assume the guise of truth; but it will be sufficient for you to remember that you would do no good by entertaining them at that exact moment. When doubts are suggested in a sudden way, the mind is incapable of reasoning upon them. Rid yourself of them for the time being, and in a different mood you will see clearly that they were temptations."

Margaret thought of Beatrice, and scarcely wished that her uncle's words should be true. Mr. Sutherland guessed what was passing in her mind. He saw that during the whole of the conversation Margaret had not entered heartily into the subject. She had given an assent, but an unwilling one. "My reasoning has been cold," he said; "it has not suited you. Are you sure, Margaret, that your feelings are not more interested than your conscience?"

Margaret tried to answer with composure, but she dreaded what might be coming. "I will try to act upon what you have said," she replied; "at least for a time."

"My dear Margaret, there must be no trusting to the future in this case. Your actions must be present."

"I will return my books. I will read the Bible more, and pray more, and I will endeavour to be contented."

"And, Margaret,"—Mr. Sutherland could with difficulty utter the words—"you will give up the Countess Novera?"

Margaret's look of utter wretchedness brought anguish to her uncle's heart. At the moment when he was inflicting so much pain his love was increasing with his compassion. "It cannot be necessary," she said, averting her face, and speaking in a broken voice. "Let me have time to consider."

"Consider, Margaret, and be lost. Consider, and make excuses;

see the Countess once more, listen to her enticing words, and Father Andrea's specious arguments, and give yourself up to them for ever."

"Then you are afraid?" said Margaret.

"Yes, afraid of your weakness, though confident, I trust, even to death, were it required of me, in the truth of the English Church."

"But if I am furnished with sound arguments?" continued Margaret.

"They will not be a safeguard against the temptations of feeling. Margaret, there is no alternative; once again place yourself within reach of the snare, and you will have no right to reckon upon the aid of the Spirit of God to save you."

"Life, a long life without her!" repeated Margaret, to herself.

"And eternity! Oh, Margaret, do not deceive yourself. Ignorance and innocence are no longer in your power. You have been warned."

"I will but repeat what you have said," replied Margaret, "I will own that I may have erred, and that it is safest we should part; and she will love me still, and the memory of her love will be the blessing of the dark years that are before me."

"You are deluding yourself," replied Mr. Sutherland. "You are reckoning upon a strength which is not yours. The Countess Novera and yourself must never meet again."

"Never! impossible! You do not know what you require."

"But I do know all that is at stake. Even if you should come forth unhurt from the trial, the very act itself would be sinful, for it would be a wilful rushing into temptation."

"I cannot bear this longer. I must be alone," exclaimed Margaret, as she moved slowly to the door, whilst her face became pale as if she would have fainted. Mr. Sutherland put out his hand to support her, and said sadly, "Margaret, will you forgive me?"

There was no answer. Mr. Sutherland dreaded even then that his efforts would be ineffectual; but as they stood together in the lobby, Margaret's assumed coldness gave way. "Pray for me," she said, bursting into tears, "and love me—I am very miserable."

"Love you through all, beyond all: One only excepted. Margaret, He has said, 'He that loveth father or mother more than me, is not worthy of me.'"

CHAPTER LXII.

THERE was little sleep for Margaret on that night; her mind could not rest in indecision. The friendship of the Countess must be either yielded or retained, and the question must be resolved immediately. The conversation which had just passed had failed in convincing her that the Countess was in error, but it had opened her eyes to the possibility of presumption in continuing the intimacy. If, as Mr. Sutherland asserted, the English Church were undeniably, indisputably true, and that it was not she could not herself at that moment declare, it was, doubtless, incurring a sinful risk to place herself within reach of the temptation to leave it. For Margaret was aware, now, that the friendship of the Countess was a temptation. It had shed a charm of romance over her life for the last two years; had contributed daily to her happiness; and had even at times come between herself and her home duties. Mr. Sutherland would have said that it had made her wilfully neglect the authority of the Church, and Margaret could not have repelled the accusation. Yet suddenly to take the final step of separation seemed impossible. Young and inexperienced, and full of warm affections, Margaret thought that if Beatrice were taken away, the rest of her life would be dreary and hopeless. It seemed, then, as if no other friendship could supply the place of hers. And this was in a measure true. That peculiar feeling with which, from congeniality of taste, or even from accidental circumstances, we regard the individuals whom we love, is theirs and theirs alone. From the unconscious child, whose laugh is music to our ears, to the parent, the husband, the brother, the wife, or the friend, who can share our every thought, there is for each a home in our hearts, which when vacant can never be filled again. We bear their images stamped upon our memories, to fade away indeed as the mists of time gather over the scenes of the past, but never to be effaced until we sink ourselves into the grave, covered with the scars of the wounds which separation and death have caused. Margaret could never restore the happiness which she had enjoyed with the Countess if it were once destroyed; but she might learn to be contented without it, though at that moment she could not believe it. She could even have said, that to bid her attempt it was cruelty, if her uncle's last words had not reminded her that the sacrifice might be demanded by a higher authority. Doubts followed, such as she herself had anticipated;

the fear, lest after all she should be choosing darkness rather than light. Mr. Sutherland's arguments seemed unconvincing; and in utter bewilderment, Margaret said that she would think no more; she would wait till sleep had restored her faculties.

Sleep came, full of wild dreams, and broken by sudden startings. In a few minutes a whole night had apparently gone by, so crowded were they with harassing scenes which left nothing but fears behind them. Towards the morning she fell into a deeper repose, yet scarcely a happier one; for once again, though dim and changing, came the dream of the unhappy Rachel de Lisle, which had before so deeply impressed her mind. Yet her feelings were not what they then had been. She stood indeed amongst the stranger crowd before the image of the Virgin; but Mr. Sutherland's warning countenance had taken the place of Father Andrea's commanding expression; and a spirit within her own breast bade her resist even unto death. All which followed was confused; but when Margaret awoke, it was with a sense of greater strength than when she lay down to rest. She sat up in bed; her brow aching, her lips feverish, and suffering from that indescribable sinking of the heart, which is the foretaste of a coming sorrow.

But a few short hours, and the Countess would be gone; and it might be well, — the separation might take place more gently in consequence. The idea was entertained for a few moments only. Margaret possessed too much energy to submit to passive endurance. She felt that some step must be taken, if it were merely to give rest to her own mind, and she set herself resolutely to think.

Every difficulty resolved itself into this one question. Could she venture to act against her uncle's advice? He required her to sacrifice a friendship which was most precious to her, because it might lead her into what he thought evil. Margaret did not see the evil, at least in the same light. To her it was doubtful only. But in questions of religion a doubt is of great weight. Romanism might be wrong — it might be schism — she might be led to embrace it — there seemed the reason for immediately turning from all that might tempt her to it. Yet again, it might be right; she might be forsaking the truth. How could she decide? Mr. Sutherland had not convinced her. He appeared indeed, scarcely inclined to attempt doing so. Was he justified in insisting upon her giving up the Countess until she was convinced? Conscience answered that, to reason clearly and impartially, our affections must be unbiassed. Still he had no absolute authority to command her. He was neither her father,

nor the clergyman of her parish; but from the circumstances of her position, he appeared to have been provided as her guide. He was her nearest relation, an ordained priest of the English Church, who had been the means of first awakening her to sense of her religious duties. In the letter he might not hav authority over her; in the spirit he certainly had. Margaret' sincerity was opening a way through the darkness; but it sti seemed that no command could be justifiably obeyed which in volved an entire surrender of her own judgment, and an abandon ment of the inquiry into subjects of such infinite importanc Yet to break off the acquaintance with the Countess did not ne cessarily involve this. It was but the removal of a stumbling block. Truth might still be sought under safer guidance. Th conclusion seemed inevitable; but the prospect was one she coul not face. Possibly some middle way might be discovered, an Margaret's indecision increased with the hope. She tried to re call all that her uncle had said — the arguments he had used and to combat them by principles and ideas which she had gaine from Father Andrea. Reasoning grew more and more difficult feeling more and more imperative. She pictured the Countess' suffering, and her own desolation, and the future seemed a drear waste. Peace! where was it to be found? and if religion coul not give it, life must be intolerable! Margaret's reliance upon her own judgment was fast dying away, for she was wearied with contradictory feelings, when suddenly, with an overwhelming horrible power, the scepticism, the awful doubt of all truth rushed again upon her mind. Her brain reeled. With a desperate effort she paused. For a few seconds all was a blank before her; but when the tide of thought seemed returning to its former channel, she had strength given her to arrest it. Reasoning she felt was hopeless. To act seemed her only safety, and she placed a sheet of paper upon her desk. Should it contain an excuse for her absence on the previous day which might leave an opening for a further communication, or should it be a settled farewell? Mar- garet wrote the first words, and laid down the pen. She might be able so to express herself as to satisfy the Countess for the time, and leave herself more leisure for consideration; and although this was not quite in accordance with Mr. Sutherland's wishes, and did not entirely ease her own conscience, it was all which she could determine upon doing; and it was at least a definite act, better than arguing. The note was finished, and Margaret proceeded to dress. But still she dwelt upon the same subject. She began to conjecture what effect the note would

have upon the Countess. The last interview had been unsatisfactory, because Margaret had been reserved. Then it was not likely that Beatrice would be contented with learning merely that unforeseen circumstances had prevented the engagement from being kept. She would be vexed and irritated, or, what was even more likely, from the eagerness and excitability of her disposition, she would come at once to the Grove. They would meet. Mr. Sutherland had said the meeting would be sinful whatever might be its result. He had no doubt as to the right course. And to risk a sin! Margaret's strength of character was not of this world, and she trembled at the idea. While still harassed by these perplexities, she knelt to her morning prayers, and asked to be kept from the path of temptation. If she were to see Beatrice, would it not be a temptation? Could she answer for herself? And after Mr. Sutherland's express advice, would it not be wrong to delay? Could delay in the least alter the duty? The prayer was stopped, for Margaret could not be double-minded. At the same instant Mr. Sutherland's voice was heard in the passage. She knew what he would expect. In explaining all to the Countess at once, there was humility, and it might be safety. In procrastination there was the spirit of self-will. It was but a dim light which was granted; but Margaret had power enough to see that she was called upon to follow it. The note was destroyed, and she sat down again, with the blank paper on her desk. Still there was the thought of delay, the wish to qualify. She pressed her hands upon her swollen eyelids, scorched with tears, and heavy with weariness, and the pulsation of her heart grew faint, and the aching of her forehead became intense pain. The sound of footsteps and laughter reached her. Grace and Philip were going into the garden to play. Oh! for one moment of childhood's freedom from care, one instant's taste of the happiness which knows no alloy!

Margaret pushed aside the paper, and walked the room quickly. Time was passing on; the day's duties were before her. Suspense was goading her to desperation, and at length, urged by conscience and sincerity to the act, though still scarcely under the influence of reason, she wrote a final farewell.

"You must have wondered at my hasty lines yesterday: you will wonder still more to-day. My thoughts have been with you through the night, and now I must write at once, or my courage may fail. The last two days have brought grief and bewilderment to my mind. Beatrice, I am told that I have been fearfully misled. I do not venture to say so myself, for my mind is a chaos;

I can judge of nothing. You will know that my uncle is returned, and perhaps the knowledge may have given you some clue to my distress. I would willingly have kept from him the secret of my wavering faith until I was strengthened by Father Andrea's arguments, but he has drawn the truth from me. How, when I look back, I can scarcely tell. Perhaps it was my own weakness, my sin. Oh, Beatrice, may you never have to endure what I am now enduring, a distrust of the path of duty! My uncle tells me I have been in grievous error. He says that I am ignorant and wilful. He is good, and wise, and self-denying—Father Andrea himself cannot surpass him—and his faith in the English Church is built on a foundation which it seems that nothing can shake; nothing, at least, that I can say, for I know nothing. I must trust either to him or to Father Andrea. There is a horrible conflict in my mind; it has even verged upon madness. When I think of you, I could follow you blindly and unhesitatingly. When I listen to him, I shrink back as from the brink of a precipice. Have pity upon me as you read, and spare me when you would condemn my irresolution. For, Beatrice, I am not irresolute. I have brought myself to an unalterable determination—the God who sees my heart knows at what a price of suffering. Your love has been a snare, and it must be relinquished. Truth is now hidden from me; I must seek for it calmly and impartially. Whilst with you that can never be, and we must part. As I write the words, your image is before me, and my brain is dizzy with wretchedness. Beatrice, how I have loved you!—not as you have loved me, with a sense of protection and compassion, but with the humble, trusting, reverential, absorbing love which is due to one so far above me in all things. And how I must love you still,—now,—henceforth,—for ever,—beyond the darkness of the grave; that is my hope, my only hope. There is a world where truth is clear as the noonday; and in that world we shall meet once more. Even now I dare not say that you are wrong. I cannot bring my mind to think it; but I know that your affection misleads my judgment; that it shakes my faith in the Church in which I was baptised. I know that whilst our intercourse remains such as it has been, the line of duty will never be made clear; and therefore I have said that we must part. Yes, it is happier for us both, and you will feel that it is so. Restraint, after the happiness we have known, would be worse than separation; and even if it were not so, I am told that I must not risk it. Yet, I cannot think that I am writing to you for the last time; that I must never see you again, except as a stranger. All the

remembrances of the past are rising before me: our first meeting abroad; that time when I knew neither the blessing nor the anguish which your love might cause; and the hallowed associations of St. Ouen; and then our personal knowledge, and the delight of our passing interviews; and my strangely sad, yet happy visit. Rhoda said that I should be safe; she knows now how best her words may be fulfilled.

"One fear I have—but I strive to cast it from me—that you will judge me hardly. You say that the spirit of the proud Viscountess is yours, and it may be that you will think of me as of her unhappy daughter; but, Beatrice, you will do me a grievous injustice. If weakness had power to lead me astray, it would be the weakness of my love for you. I am acting indeed under guidance; but if you knew the state of my mind, you would be the last to bid me trust to myself. I could write on for hours; for whilst I am writing, I am with you; when my letter is closed, we are parted. Think of me, and when you think, pray. God will listen to your prayers, and give us that which is most needful for us both. And, Beatrice, you will hear of me; there is no reason that you should not. I shall never hear of you; I could not bear it. My walks, and books, and pursuits, must all be changed. I must enter upon another life. Perhaps it is in mercy that the trials of my home are so ordered as to force me to active exertion; possibly in scenes distant from these. The future lies dark before me. Once I thought that it could never be so while you were living; but God has chastened His sinful child, and I would seek to be submissive to His will. I dare not think what you will feel or say when you read this. My heart becomes rebellious, and would fain seek a means of escape. You will be sorrowful, dearest Beatrice, for you have loved me truly; but you can never feel what I feel, for you never can have reverenced as I have done. Perhaps England will be sad to you without me, and you will return to Italy; perhaps you will leave Henningsley. I must try not to think; but my resolution cannot be shaken. I must neither see nor hear from you. Say to Father Andrea (I do not venture to write to him) that my deepest gratitude must ever be his, for the effort he has made in my behalf. A doubt comes over me that in leaving him I am leaving the way of truth. He will grieve over me, and tell me that it is so; but I have no power to decide. Inquiry must come at a future period. If my life should be spared, and the calmness of my mind restored, I have faith that a light will be granted to my ignorance. Now I can but yield to the guide whom God has given me, and trust

that all will be well. Is this cold and ungrateful?—do not let it seem so. You, who know me best, can assure him of my reverence and thanks. One comfort I shall have in prayer for you both. When we parted last, you complained that I would have kept back from you my confidence; that thought weighs heavily upon my mind. Will you not believe now that you should know all, to the very utmost you might desire?—but I am selfish, and can think only of my own wretchedness. There is another fear which oppresses me—for your health; it will follow me always. I think I could bear to hear that you were in Italy; but I must not hear,—at least, not at present—not from yourself. It would be cruelty to continue to write to me, for I could not dare to answer you. The sun shines so brightly! but a few days since it would have been the prophecy of happiness with you. Now,—God grant that the sun may shine upon you wherever your home may be,—the sun of His presence and His love! Dearest Beatrice, ask this blessing for me, and I will ask it for you. And may our eyes at length be opened to a knowledge of His truth!

"Yours (in the fullest sense of the words),

"For ever,

"MARGARET PERCIVAL."

And Margaret laid her head upon the table, and wept most bitterly.

The Countess Novera arose at an unusually early hour, to prepare for the journey which was before her. She was calm in manner, for Lucia was near; and the disappointment which was in her heart she would not for worlds have betrayed. They breakfasted together, almost in silence. The Countess ate nothing; but would not allow that she was more unwell than usual. Lucia proposed that she should rest until the carriage was actually at the door, and the Countess agreed; yet she would not remain in the drawing-room, for Lucia's presence was a burden. Some messages and notes were brought during the breakfast, and at each entrance of the servant the Countess turned round quickly; then, as she encountered Lucia's eye, her manner became composed, and her heart grew sterner, for she said to herself that Margaret had deceived her; that she had professed a love which she did not feel, and that apologies could only serve to make the truth more evident. They were to leave Henningsley at eleven. Lucia was ready before, and walking on the terrace. It could scarcely be said that she was happier than she had lately been, for she was indulging an evil passion, the satisfaction of a

triumphant jealousy; but she did believe that it might be possible now to regain her lost place in the Countess's affections. As she looked over the park, a man was seen approaching from the lodge. He drew nearer, and Lucia perceived Dr. Percival's livery. There was a message, then — perhaps an explanation — perhaps an entreaty that Margaret might see the Countess before she went. In an instant the jealous fit had returned in full force. Lucia opened the shrubbery gate and went into the park. The man touched his hat, and would have passed on to the house, but she stopped him. "Had he any note?"

"Yes, one from the Grove; he had been charged not to delay it."

"Then give it me, I will take it;" and Lucia held out her hand.

The writing was Margaret's! it was more than a note, apparently a letter. What could be the contents? The servant turned homewards, and Lucia stood to rest under the trees. What would she not have given to read the contents of the packet? She fancied they would be decisive of her own fate, and why should she not? Delicacy — honour — forbade it; but jealousy is stronger than honour; the Bible says that there are cases in which it is "cruel as the grave." It was the impulse of a moment; yet not so — it was the crowning act of months of cherished sin. Lucia loosened the seal, even in her agitation carefully, that the letter might be firmly re-sealed again. The handwriting was trembling, and the pages were blotted with tears. She read on, hurriedly — nervously — scarcely at first taking in the sense of the expressions; but the fact was realised by degrees. The object of her wishes was attained. The Countess and Margaret would be separated. Yet Lucia perused the lines once more. The case seemed less certain. Beatrice was not likely to submit to such a parting: Margaret's unhappiness would touch her to the heart; she would insist upon seeing her; she would urge her to retreat; the journey to London would be postponed; Father Andrea's aid would be called in; and Margaret would be bound for ever to the Romish Church, and, as a consequence, to the Countess Novera. There was a safer, a surer way. As the case stood now, Margaret would never write again. The Countess was angry, her notes of expostulation would be cold, and they would be unanswered. Lucia was too impetuous to calculate upon all the probable events which, even if this letter were never seen, might sooner or later produce an explanation. Her only desire was to gain time, to prevent the Countess from remaining a day longer at Henningsley, or making an effort to see Margaret. The temptation presented itself, and it

was followed. Lucia had suffered herself too long to be the victim of her passion to struggle against it. The letter was torn into a hundred pieces, and scattered to the winds. A pang of shame and horror ensued; but it was conquered. Lucia said to herself that she had made the case neither better nor worse than it was before: Margaret had declared that they must not meet, and they would not. She appeared before the Countess still and reserved, as was her wont: but there was a crimson spot burning on her cheek, and her voice was tremulous; and when, an hour afterwards, the carriage drove past the gates of the Grove, and Beatrice, leaning far back, covered her face to hide the tears which streamed down her pale cheeks—Lucia's conscience felt so terrible a reproach, that to have had the letter once more in her possession, she would thankfully have heard that Margaret Percival was to be the Countess's friend and companion for ever.

CHAPTER LXIII.

Four weeks of the bright early summer had passed away, and all things were blest and joyous. So at least it seemed to such as could watch the beauty of the external world without marring its loveliness by the associations which sin and suffering have caused. The Church, following her yearly course of holy days and fasts, had again reached the festival of St. Barnabas, and, in many a Christian temple and from many a Christian heart, fervent prayers and hallowed thoughts were rising to heaven, in gratitude for the manifold gifts which the Almighty has, in all ages, bestowed upon His people, and entreaties for grace, that they might be used continually to His glory. And is there any grace or any gift higher or purer than the gift of cheerful resignation? Not the cold stoicism of the heathen, which bids us endure because we cannot escape; neither the self-sufficient pride of the sceptic, which, looking upon sickness and sorrow as unmixed evil, would call upon us to pass through the trials of life like men struggling with a deadly enemy, whom to conquer is to be glorious; but the meek, heartfelt, loving resignation, of the spirit, obedient to a Father's will, conscious of infirmity, thankful for chastening, and even while yet prosperous and happy, owning that they are blest to whom it has been granted to be partakers of their Saviour's suffering, and bear the burden

of that cross which He left as a precious legacy to His true disciples.

Margaret Percival had full need of all the resignation which the teaching of the Word of God and the holy examples of His saints could impart. Her home was desolate, her mother a widow. She herself crushed by disappointed affection, and suffering from the pressure of the first overpowering affliction of her family, and the physical weakness consequent upon days and nights of watching by her father's dying bed. Yet even in that hour of trial Margaret could be thankful. She could turn from her own secret grief—the question which would frequently arise, whether she had acted kindly and wisely—the anguish of suspense, with which day after day she waited for a letter from the Countess, whilst no letter came; she could trust herself to look upon the future, and to recall the last sorrowful scenes of her father's life: she could even sustain the occasional torture of reviving doubts (for although they were kept under by Mr. Sutherland's assistance, they could not suddenly be removed), because she had followed the clear line of duty, and had walked by the faint light which was afforded her, without seeking to delay, in the vain expectation that the noonday would in a moment follow upon midnight.

Dr. Percival's illness had at the last increased most rapidly. Within a fortnight of his death Margaret had still retained a lingering hope; but he himself had none. The breaking up of a constitution which, for years, had been tried by great mental and physical fatigue, was not a complaint from which it was probable he should recover; and he watched his own symptoms with an eye quickened by experience, and rendered suspicious by uneasiness of mind arising from the unsettled state in which his affairs must be left, and the difficulties which would in consequence surround his wife and children. Margaret had a more than ordinary trial to go through, when it was declared certain, according to all human knowledge, that her father could not live. Mrs. Percival's energy broke down at the announcement: she was overpowered by the presence not only of grief, but of perplexing worldly business. Her husband would willingly have given her directions for the future, but she could not listen to him. It was Margaret, who was to be present during the laywer's visits; Margaret, who was to hear of debts and insurances; Margaret, who was to receive advice as to what it would be most desirable for the family to do in the event of Dr. Percival's death. Yet there was mercy in the affliction, a peculiar mercy to Margaret. Her thoughts were withdrawn from herself, and in the midst of her distress there

were moments of inexpressible comfort; as she saw reason to believe that suffering had wrought its hallowed work upon her father's mind. The ordeal at last was, however, very severe. Responsibility and exertion were in a measure taken from herself, for Mr. Sutherland came, and Craven and George; and she was left more to her own reflections. From the wish to help her they gave her too much rest. Mr. Sutherland saw her looking ill, and often sent her to her room to sleep; but Margaret could not sleep. She could forget for a few minutes; but then the reality would come back with increasing bitterness. And in the darkness and loneliness of night, bright memories of the past returned to mock her. She thought of Beatrice, repeated her own sad letter, and dwelt upon each separate expression, hoping to discover what could have been the offence which had so warped the Countess's true and generous spirit as to induce her to depart without one answering word of kindness; whilst, as examination failed to throw light upon the mystery, the tears of disappointment flowed afresh, and when Margaret again slept, it was but to renew her grief in dreams.

And now the worst trial of the family was over. Pain could never again be felt; helplessness could never be a burden; the lingering agony of a parting hour could no more break down the fortitude of the man whose life had been spent in scenes of suffering, whose years had been numbered by the death-beds which he had attended. In the consciousness of the near approach of his last moments, Dr. Percival called around his bed those whom he best loved; he renewed Craven's earnest confession of repentance, and granted him his full forgiveness. He bade farewell to all, and withdrawing his thoughts from earth, rested them upon the Saviour before whom he was about to appear. The last rays of life flickered for a few still awful moments, and then they were extinguished in death; and on the festival of St. Barnabas Dr. Percival was borne to his grave, and his wife and children were left in their desolate home, to decide upon the steps which must be taken for the conduct of their future life. Margaret, after a morning that required all her self-command, saw her mother attempting to sleep, and then went to her own room. The extent of her loss was forcing itself upon her more and more; and the reaction consequent upon the exertion she had been making soon came. A sense of misery, such as she had never before experienced, overpowered her; not the shrinking from present grief, but a vague indescribable fear; the first consciousness of what it might be in the capacity of man to suffer; the first glimpse into that

deep, dark gulf of woe, which can never be fathomed save in the unseen world.

With those who have cast off religion, despair is the only refuge in sorrow; but Margaret's anguish was but momentary, for the God whom she served was near to comfort her. Speculative difficulties were less frequently suggested to her mind than they had been, and she had learnt how to deal with them; and now, after a quarter of an hour spent in solitude, she wandered into the garden, with a spirit subdued, but comparatively at peace. She wished to find her uncle. His society was the only relief she could have; but he was not there, and she was joined by Craven and Agatha. It had required some effort on Margaret's part to meet her brother cordially when he first arrived at home. She did not think that he was the sole cause of her father's illness, but she could not forget that it was the shock which his follies had caused that brought it to a climax. Craven felt this fully himself. He was in manner a changed person. Perhaps no other event would have been sufficient to check him in his career of extravagance; but this served as a constant memento. Every time he heard from home he was reminded of the distress there; that they were suffering, when he, by reason of his father's kindness, was just rejoicing in the relief from a load of care. Craven was not so much selfish by nature as by habits of personal indulgence. The better feelings of his heart were awakened, and the resolution which he had once more taken, never again to resort to the gaming-table, had, up to the present moment, been strictly kept. He was happier from the sense of self-control, if not from any higher cause; but there was no happiness for him when he returned home. It is one thing to hear of sorrow at a distance,—another to be present with it. Craven's grief, when he found, on reaching the Grove, that there really was no hope of his father's recovery, quite softened Margaret's heart; and now, though his frame of mind was not likely to be quite congenial, she willingly put her arm within his, and showed in manner, though not in words, that it gave her satisfaction to be with him. The subject in her own mind was not, however, one which could be shared with him. She was thinking of her father and of all that had been gone through for the last month, and gaining comfort from the retrospection, which neither Craven nor Agatha would have understood. Margaret could not at such a moment, and upon such a topic, risk an observation, and silence seemed preferred by mutual consent. Agatha especially appeared indisposed for conversation: she looked ill, and her features, sharpened by grief and vexation, had

lost something of their beauty in consequence; but the general expression was softer and more subdued.

"I must go to-morrow," said Craven, rather abruptly.

"Must you so soon? surely they will spare you a few more days for my mother's sake?"

"The army is not a profession which considers private interests much, I imagine," observed Agatha.

"No, I must go.—I shall not be back here for an age."

"Then you will not be back here at all," replied Margaret.

Agatha looked up quickly, and said,—"I did not know that was certain."

"Did you not? I supposed we all knew it. It has been talked of long, and my mother is prepared for it."

Craven put his hand to his forehead. "Horrible folly!" he muttered.

"Nay, dear Craven; it may not be as bad as you think," said Margaret, with a great effort to conceal the pain which the idea actually gave her. "Change may be good for us; and, independent of you, it is most probable that, under the present circumstances, it would have come."

"The house would be too large soon," remarked Agatha; "you away, and George and Philip at college and at school."

"And even if it were not," added Margaret, "houses are incumbrances, except where people are grand enough to have eldest sons."

"Or unfortunate enough," again muttered Craven.

"I do not see what we are to do, though," said Agatha, "has my uncle any notion?"

The "we" was not agreeable to Margaret: she had once or twice lately flattered herself that Agatha's temper was altering, and becoming less wilful, and that some happy coincidence of circumstances might bring about a reconciliation with her husband. She made no reply to the question, until Agatha repeated,—

"Has my uncle any notion?"

"No, I have not spoken to him; but I must, if poor mamma does not; something must be settled soon."

Craven could not bear the conversation. Margaret's quiet manner did not hide from him what was really underneath.—"Margaret you are an angel," he whispered, and withdrawing his arm, he turned into a side-walk.

"I think so too, sometimes, Margaret," said Agatha, when they were left together; "you have to bear with all."

"There would be little to bear," replied Margaret, "if it were not for one's own faults; they make one weak."

"Yes; but you have fewer than most people."

Margaret expressed neither surprise nor pain at the assertion. It would only have brought upon her a repetition of the unfounded praise.—"These are times to feel weak," she said; "I used to think I could bear trial well."

"Did you? I never did."

"It is easier for some people to act than to bear," said Margaret; "easier for me, I think."

"I am not sure that it is for me."—Agatha mused for a few moments, and then added, with more of excitement than was usual—"this strange day—it is like a dream."

"From which we shall never wake," replied Margaret; "nothing now can make life what it has been, at least to me."

"Nor to me," and Agatha heaved a sigh.

"Would you have it so?" asked Margaret, whilst she strove to gather the true answer in her sister's face.

Agatha's dark blue eyes were dimmed with tears, as she rejoined, "Mine has not been a happy life."

"As a child it was."

"No,—not happy: contented only. I have never had what I wished."

"Then no one can be happy," said Margaret.

"And no one is. Oh, Margaret! this world is very wearisome."

"Most wretched, if it were not for one's duties," said Margaret.

"But I have no duties, no object; why should I live?"

Margaret hesitated a little, and then with a sudden resolution, as seizing an opportunity which she saw ought not to be neglected, she said, "But, Agatha, this need not be. No one could have plainer duties than yourself, if you would look at them."

Agatha made a gesture of impatience, and stooped to gather a flower.

"We must not be vexed with each other to-day, dearest, of all days," continued Margaret; "we have no love now to throw away."

"I have told you often that I will not bear interference," replied Agatha, proudly.

"Yes, and I never meant to interfere. I only thought of your happiness."

"Thank you, Margaret," and Agatha smiled bitterly; "but you

are wasting your thoughts upon that which does not, and cannot exist.—Peace I may have at home; but happiness nowhere."

"Peace in your own true home," persisted Margaret: "if you were enabled to return to it."

"Peace! with a weak, heartless, ignorant man, whose every word is a reproach to me for the folly of marrying him?"

Margaret's memory travelled back many, many months; to the conversation which she had held with Agatha at Rouen, on the night when the intended marriage had been acknowledged. She had, however, too much kindness of heart to refer to her own prophecies, and merely answered, "If you were now living at Ashington, trying to please your husband, and bear with his temper, and doing good to the utmost of your power, I think you must find peace; here, there must always be a consciousness that you are not in your proper place."

"You wish me to leave you," exclaimed Agatha; "I have often thought I was a burden."

"You do not mean what you say, dear Agatha," replied Margaret, with perfect mildness; "the affection of your own family you must always have; if you had not been persuaded of this, you never would have proposed returning to us. But it is no question of liking or disliking, simply of duty."

"And who is to make the first advance?" inquired Agatha, in a more gentle tone; "Colonel Clive has never inquired about me; he has been quite satisfied with my absence."

"I do not think you are a fair judge of this; for you can have heard nothing about him. But I do not pretend to say how such advances could be made; all I think is, that Ashington is your rightful home, and that nothing can go well until you are restored to it."

Agatha strongly remonstrated against the notion; insisting that the difference of their position must incapacitate her sister from forming a correct judgment.

"It was not my judgment only," replied Margaret, gravely and sorrowfully; "there was another which we shall ever be bound to respect, that entirely coincided with it."

"My father's," said Agatha, in a faltering voice; "but he did not know the circumstances."

"He guessed that you were remaining here because you were not happy at Ashington; and several times he said that he wished it could be otherwise. Think what he would have felt if he had known the truth."

Margaret's manner became very earnest, and Agatha was not

untouched by it. A few tears rolled down her cheek, and she turned to Margaret and kissed her; and, as Mr. Sutherland approached, walked quickly away in order not to betray her unusual emotion.

CHAPTER LXIV.

It was more the natural temper of Margaret's mind to look up and be advised, than to give advice to others; and with her uncle she was now quite at ease. There were no subjects on which they had not a common interest. That which was at the moment the most present to her, the thought of her father, was one in which he could entirely sympathise; for Mr. Sutherland, more than any other person, had been admitted into Dr. Percival's confidence. They paced the lawn together for the next hour, recalling little scenes and trifling words, and dwelling upon the many mercies which had been mixed up with this great affliction, and Margaret found consolation in her uncle's presence, and spoke openly of herself, and did not then think that any safer guide or better friend could be found than a devoted English clergyman. Yet she acknowledged that her mind was not yet clear. Doubts were banished, but they would return. "They come at most painful moments," she said, as Mr. Sutherland warned her that it would be long before they would leave her. "Last week there were times which I can scarcely venture to recall; when I was sitting with dear papa, and everything was still. He asked me once himself what was the matter, and it seemed so strange. He never used to notice our manner."

"He had no leisure," said Mr. Sutherland; "perhaps it was happy for him in some ways; he was saved much that might have vexed him."

"Yes," replied Margaret, struggling against the overpowering rush of early recollections; "it gives me such pleasure now to think what a happy home he had. When we were quite little things, mamma always tried to make us good before he came back; not to worry him."

"There were many mercies which followed him through his whole life," said Mr. Sutherland; "but none so great as at the last."

"The quiet sinking," replied Margaret, in an under tone, "and the time for retrospection."

"And the spirit to profit by the opportunity," continued Mr. Sutherland; "we can never be sufficiently grateful for that."

Margaret's voice was choked when she would have answered; but with strong resolution she resumed her self-command. "It is a great change," she said, after a short silence; "I am sure we cannot tell yet how great."

"If an uncle's love could supply the loss of a father's, Margaret, you should never know a moment's regret."

Margaret pressed her uncle's arm, but she could not thank him in words; and he added, with the wish to divert her thoughts, "You must come to me now for everything; I would share all, if possible, for there will be much that will press heavily upon you, though we may be certain that it will be good in the end."

"It is good," said Margaret, "I feel it now. It prevents me from thinking; and I am selfish through all this. I cannot help looking back to the past."

"And the Countess Novera?" said Mr. Sutherland.

"Yes, I blame myself for allowing any thought except one to occupy me; but it seems that all would be so much lighter, if this were not added."

It was a grief hard to console, and Mr. Sutherland did not attempt it. "It would have been easier," he answered, "if it had been the will of God. Yet you must remember, that now, from other circumstances, you must have been separated."

"But not with anger and silence," replied Margaret. "Yet how could my miserable words have offended her?"

"It may be the confessor's command."

Margaret shook her head doubtfully. "Father Andrea is too wise for that. He knows that Beatrice can have nothing to fear from me; no, it is in her own mind. I saw that something was working there when I last talked with her. She required more confidence, and I would have given it. I would have told her everything; but it is too late."

"My own dear child, you must indeed endeavour to forget," said Mr. Sutherland, affectionately.

"I do endeavour; I do more than endeavour, I pray; yet I am wretched. Uncertainty is very trying."

"If it were but possible to comfort you, Margaret!" exclaimed Mr. Sutherland; "but you can say for yourself all that I would say; and you would think me cold. There must, however, be some satisfaction in the sacrifice."

"Sometimes, for a few moments; but it is not a willing sacri-

should be blighted. And Craven,—it is hard to be charitable to him when one thinks of George."

"Only that events are not at our ordering," replied her uncle. "Craven's faults appear to us to be the cause of George's disappointment; but if it were not the will of God that his plan of life should be changed, we should find that some other means of keeping him at college would be provided."

"And he will go into a merchant's office then," said Margaret, trying to speak contentedly; but in a moment she added — "his reading, and talents, and his high principles, and strength of character; all to be buried in a counting-house!"

"Not buried, Margaret. Where God places them, there they must be destined to be useful. George would be the last person to speak of being buried anywhere."

"George will be more vexed than you think," said Margaret; "I am sure he is not prepared for this."

Mr. Sutherland became more grave than before. "I will trust him," he said, "to bear it as a Christian should do. The principle which has never been weakened by vice is equal to any trial."

At that instant George came into the garden with the children. They were clinging to him with a half-bewildered manner, sometimes speaking cheerfully, and then lowering their voices and remembering "poor mamma," and wondering why the garden and all were so changed. Harriet walked close to her brother's side. Her eyes were red with crying, and she tried to stop the thoughtless remarks of the little ones. Margaret fondly watched her brother as he drew near. The quick intelligence of his eye, his handsome face, and the thoughtfulness of his quiet, gentlemanly manner, could never, she thought, be destined for a counting-house. Mr. Sutherland had said that if it were the will of God, some means of keeping him at college would be provided. Then it was not clear yet that he was destined for a merchant; and Margaret said to herself that she would leave no plan untried — she would devote herself, to the utmost point of duty, to prevent her favourite brother from being disappointed in his prospects for life.

CHAPTER LXV.

For a short time our attention must be turned from the sad and changing scenes which were passing at the Grove, to the active, noisy, engrossing world of the metropolis. In the same fashionable hotel, formed expressly for luxury and gaiety, in which the Countess Novera had spent the few weeks of her first residence in London, she was again domesticated with Lucia. The heat of London was intense, its bustle distracting, its society little calculated to soothe a wounded spirit; but Beatrice was in no state to think of change. She was lying helpless and miserable upon a sick bed, suffering the punishment of the vain endeavours by which she had sought upon her arrival to occupy her time and thoughts, and forget Margaret and Henningsley. The Countess Novera was proud; it was the distinguishing characteristic of her family. She had yielded with enthusiasm to her love for Margaret, overlooking the distinctions of rank, and breaking down the barriers of reserve; at times, even humbling herself in her own eyes, that so she might the more fully win the confidence of her friend; and her affection had, she now persuaded herself, been made a matter of calculation; her advances had been met only in form; reciprocal confidence had been withheld; and the hope of conversion upon which she had so firmly relied, she believed to be but a mark assumed for the purpose of more easily gaining her friendship. It would have been a severe disappointment for any person; for the Countess Novera it was in the utmost degree humiliating. She had no gentle thoughts of Margaret upon leaving Henningsley: she expected to hear from her; but she had made up her mind that the letter would only prove more clearly that the reports which Lucia had brought were correct. Days went by, however, and no letter arrived. Beatrice thought of writing herself, but she did not know what tone to assume. There was no just cause of offence, yet she could not write warmly; and to write coldly would be worse than not at all. If Margaret really cared for her silence, it was certain that she would, as she had often done before, expostulate; and the expostulation might possibly show that in all she had professed she was sincere. If she did not care—the Countess's spirit was roused to indignation by the bare idea,—the sooner Margaret was forgotten the better. All this was very unjust, very hasty, very unlike what Margaret would have felt in a similar case, and

if Father Andrea had been near, the Countess might have been brought to a more reasonable, charitable mind. But he was absent still; detained on pressing business of his Church, and so engaged, that Beatrice did not like to obtrude her own vexations upon his attention. Left to the society of Lucia, the Countess plunged into the distractions of London life. She had no taste for frivolities, nor any love of admiration; and she was told by the physicians whom she consulted that her health would require the utmost care; but her acquaintances were ready to assure her, that care did not mean seclusion; and a few, pretending to much knowledge of her case, laughed at the idea of enlivening society being injurious as long as she was not exposed to cold. Beatrice scarcely allowed that she was pleased or amused; but she was occupied, and occupation to a mind of such energy was the one great desideratum. The imprudence, however, was soon punished. After a few weeks of that which the world calls gaiety, but which by the Countess was felt to be a senseless, often unhappy, waste of time, she was obliged to confess herself seriously ill. It was proposed to send for Father Andrea; and Lady Anstruther, the only one of her relations who was admitted to see her, looked sorrowfully at Lucia, and prophesied that after such a serious attack the Countess could little expect to pass another winter in England.

Then Lucia, it may be supposed, had obtained her object, and was contented. But contentment was not the expression of her face as she stood by the Countess's bed-side, and marked the havoc which disease had made. She was pale almost as Beatrice herself; her eyes had lost their brilliancy, and her lips were parched with fever of mind and body. Her movements were startling, and unfitted for a sick room, and her restlessness and unsteady hand, often made the Countess beg that she would give up the wish of nursing her, and leave her to the care of servants. Lucia sometimes refused; but as often she consented. The pleasure of being with Beatrice was gone. Hasty words or coldness repelled her, and kind ones were a reproach, bitter beyond imagination. She would frequently rush from the room suddenly, merely to avoid the Countess's thanks. They were not deserved, for she had injured her; and they were not hearty, though Beatrice did her utmost to make them so. The Countess, after a few days, rallied from her alarming attack, and Father Andrea's return was postponed in consequence. Beatrice proposed this herself, though sadly against her will. His presence would have been an unspeakable comfort; and she expected him

with the impatience of a child, and with the conviction that even her health would improve if he were near to advise her. Some things he was certain to decide rightly—whether it would be desirable to risk a return to Henningsley; and if not, whether they should remain in England for the summer, or go at once to Italy; at all events, what directions should be given for carrying out their plans for the Henningsley peasantry. All these points weighed upon the Countess's mind; she was eager that they should be settled. Illness was making hourly inroads upon her constitution, and vexation was wearing her spirits; and when a prospect of peace opened before her, it was only as in fancy she pictured herself calmly sinking into the grave, soothed by the hallowed offices of religion.

But Father Andrea's arrival was to Lucia an event to be dreaded above all others. During the time when he had been expected, she was almost desperate with fear and doubt as to how she could hide from him the secrets of her heart.

Lucia had been guilty of a gross violation of the laws of honour to satisfy her jealousy, and no sooner was the act committed than she perceived the difficulties of her position. Without confession there could be no absolution. If she confessed to Father Andrea, he could not betray her, but he would doubtless insist upon her acknowledging the truth to Beatrice. This would happen whilst they were in England, and the sacrifice of principle which she had made would prove useless, for an explanation with Margaret must necessarily follow. The difficulty could be avoided in one way only. The Countess was still constantly alluding to Lucia's departure, for Lady Anstruther was inclined to hasten her intended journey, and set off immediately. Lucia had sinned to gratify her wish of remaining with the Countess, and now the sin itself was forcing her to leave her. If she could go with Lady Anstruther into the country, and remain with her until they embarked, she might avoid Father Andrea, and wait for her confession until she arrived in Italy. By that time it was nearly certain that Beatrice herself would have left England, and the estrangement from Margaret would be completed. Priests might be found less rigid than Father Andrea, who would not insist upon the open acknowledgment of her guilt; or, if this were not so, she did not despair under any circumstances of obtaining the Countess's forgiveness, if only she could keep her secret until Beatrice was beyond the possible reach of Margaret's influence.

There was, however, no time to be lost. Even a short delay

might bring Father Andrea back, and circumstances might then prevent her from carrying out her plan. The Countess was surprised at the change in Lucia's views. Before, the very mention of Italy had caused a clouded brow, if not a burst of tears; but now the subject of the return was entered upon with warmth. Lucia discussed Lady Anstruther's proposed journey, and strenuously advocated the idea of an instant departure; and when difficulties were started as to the preparations, she suggested, and afterwards urgently insisted upon leaving the Countess with her maid to await Father Andrea's arrival, and proceeding herself with Lady Anstruther into Devonshire, in order to assist her in arranging all things necessary for the journey, and subsequent residence abroad. The idea was seconded by the Countess, who was too ill to have any pleasure in society, and was burdened rather than comforted by having Lucia with her. Still there were further delays, very awkward and inconvenient for Lucia's wishes, and she could ill bear them. Conscience was not asleep; and it goaded her sometimes almost to the point of confession to the Countess, but shame and jealousy kept her back. She could have submitted to anger and reproaches, but not to have seen Margaret re-established in the Countess's affection. And so the days glided on, sadly and monotonously to the Countess; yet each one full of fear and anxiety to Lucia. Lady Anstruther fixed her time for going into the country, but the journey was postponed. She fixed again, and still there was something to be done; whilst the post brought constant announcements that Father Andrea's business must soon be finished, and that he was longing for the time when he might rejoin them.

"You will see him after all, Lucia," said the Countess, as the letters were laid upon the table one morning, before she had left her room. "I do not mean, of course, that you would, under any circumstances, have left England without seeing him; but he will be here whilst you are still in town."

"Indeed! are you sure?" Lucia's colour changed rapidly. "Does he say so himself?"

"He does not mention any particular time, but he defers some important matters till we meet, which he trusts will be much sooner than he at first anticipated."

"Lady Anstruther is to let me know her movements for certain this morning," replied Lucia, becoming very uneasy; "she talked of going this afternoon."

"I scarcely think she will have finished all she has to do so soon," observed the Countess.

Lucia left the room quickly, finding the conversation insupportable, and determined that, as far as it lay in her power, Lady Anstruther should not stay another day. There was no cause, however, for any interference on her part. Lady Anstruther sent word that she was quite ready, and would come to the hotel at one o'clock, say good bye to the Countess, and then take Lucia away. Her arrangements seemed to be made so decidedly, that Beatrice considered it would be useless to attempt to alter them. She could not, however, avoid expressing some surprise that Lucia should appear anxious to go.

"Father Andrea had been absent from them for several weeks," she said, "and it would have appeared natural for her to wish to see him, though only for a few minutes."

Lucia replied "that she did wish to see him,"—it was one among many falsehoods into which she had lately been led,—"but she considered it would be troublesome to make another change—in fact, as the case stood, it was impossible." The Countess did not question this, and was not particularly interested in the matter; the alteration of a day made little difference to her, though it was everything to Lucia.

"It seems sudden at the last," she said, kindly; "though I have expected it. Are you sure, dear child, that this notion of yours is wise? Might it not be better, after all, to stay with me till the very last?"

Lucia's equanimity was upset by the tone of affection, and she answered, half in reproach, and half in sadness,—"If I could have been useful, I would have remained always, Signora. But Lauretta is more to you than I am."

"More in actually attending upon me, because she has been accustomed to my ways. But do not think of me, Lucia; think of yourself. Shall you like going with Lady Anstruther to her home?"

"I shall like nothing when I am away from you; but I must be accustomed to it."

"Nay, you must remember that I am almost sure to follow you soon. Lady Anstruther has a full dependence upon it. She is to travel in Italy for some months, and in the winter we are to share the Palazzo Novera together. But you will be almost as near to me as she will be. We shall see each other constantly."

"Never, never, as before."

"It might be quite as before, dear Lucia, if you would expect from me that only which I can give. And have I ever deceived you?"

"It was my own folly," murmured Lucia; "I thought that earth could contain another love such as mine, but it cannot." The Countess was silent, and Lucia continued — "And I shall never live with you again; we shall meet occasionally as strangers."

"Oh, Lucia, that is cruel to me! A stranger!—you whom I shall ever feel myself bound to protect, and from whom I am parting solely because it is not in my power to render you happy!"

Lucia sank into a gloomy reverie, which was broken by a simple observation from Beatrice, that yet made her start as if an adder had stung her.

"I shall write to you when I hear of your friends at Henningsley."

"Yes, if you please:" the sentence ended abruptly, and Lucia again became abstracted.

"Can Lauretta help you?" said the Countess. "It is late."

Lucia rose in an instant. "I forgot—yes, I must go;" yet she lingered still.

"And what message shall I give to Father Andrea?" inquired the Countess.

"Message!" slowly repeated Lucia.

"Yes, he will expect something."

"I am sorry, very sorry; but it cannot be helped; it is not my doing."

"No, indeed, who would suspect you of that? But I shall send him to see you before you sail."

"There will scarcely be time," said Lucia, in a hurried tone; "and the distance is great; and he has been away from you so long."

"I have borne his absence for weeks," replied Beatrice, "and a day or so will not make much difference. You shall see him, certainly, if it can possibly be managed."

Lucia did not venture to object further, but she would not pursue the subject.

"Lady Anstruther says nothing about the governess, does she?" inquired the Countess, as Lucia was leaving her.

"No; she told me yesterday, Signora, that she had described exactly what she wanted; and that she fully depended upon your finding some one to suit her."

"She requires so much," said Beatrice, musingly; "perfection; and where is it to be met with?"

"I am annoyed that she should have troubled you about it,"

continued Lucia. "It would have been much kinder to have arranged everything herself."

"I cannot blame her, Lucia. The little girl must have change immediately; so that she is obliged to set off, and has no time for inquiries; and I am only to see the persons who apply, and then decide."

"And perhaps you will be ill, and be obliged to write letters, and talk; and you are not equal to any exertion," said Lucia, almost inclined at the idea to change her plan, and remain.

Beatrice leant back, fatigued even with this short conversation, but Lucia could not indulge her affection. The moments were precious, and at the risk of appearing unfeeling and ungrateful, she was obliged to give up the care of the Countess to Lauretta, and prepare for leaving her at a time when especially the presence of a friend would have been a blessing.

Lady Anstruther came punctually to her appointment. She had been fortunate in transacting all her business, and was impatient to go. "Her child," she said, "was pining for the country air, and every day was of consequence to her; otherwise she would, on no account, have hurried Lucia away." The Countess detained her in conversation about the governess, and insisted that luncheon should be ordered before they set of. "For Lucia's sake it was necessary, as she had eaten scarcely any breakfast, and had rather a long journey before her." Lucia was wandering about the room in great nervous agitation, pretending to seek for things which she knew were not wanted, and occasionally standing at the window, to watch the impatient horses; and trying to make some observation which should bring Lady Anstruther's final instructions to a close.

"Then you will remember, she must be high-principled, clever, and accomplished; and a lady by birth and education," Lucia heard at last;—"I quite depend upon you."

"And now you will take some luncheon?" said the Countess.

Lucia was relieved. She was moving from the window, when her attention was arrested. A cab had driven up to the door of the hotel—nothing unusual, yet Lucia staid to observe who might alight. It was a traveller, certainly, for some luggage was first taken out. Lucia's eyes rested upon a travelling-case, of a peculiar shape and size. She recognised it, and her heart sickened. In another moment Father Andrea alighted.

"Lucia, cara, you must come," said the Countess, in her softest, sweetest tone. But an angel's voice would have been unheeded

at that instant. Lucia was immoveable. "She is in a reverie," said the Countess, smiling; and she went to the window.

Lucia started, when a light touch was laid upon her shoulder: she strove to be unconcerned, but her uneasy glance was again directed to the street, and the Countess's eye followed hers.

"It is Father Andrea!" exclaimed Beatrice, with eager delight. She stood with the door half open listening for the confessor's footsteps. Lady Anstruther watched from the window, and no thought was given to the conscience-stricken Lucia, who had sunk trembling into the nearest chair. "Yet," she said to herself, "it was a foolish fear; it would be the delay but of a few minutes."

"Only just in time, father," was the Countess's salutation, as she took the confessor's hand affectionately. "Lucia would have been miserable if you had come an hour later."

Lucia was miserable then, if the unsettled, wild eye, and quiver ing lip told a true tale, and Father Andrea was not miserable, but very disturbed. He looked intently at the Countess.

"My daughter, you are sadly altered."

"I have been ill, father, as I wrote you word; but I shall be well now you are here. And do not think of me,—think of Lucia; she is just going."

Father Andrea turned to Lucia a glance very different from that which he had directed to the Countess. It was coldly stern, and Lucia quailed beneath it. Yet why should she fear? What could Father Andrea know?

"Lady Anstruther will pardon me," said the confessor. "I would willingly retain both my daughters for a few days. We have been some weeks separated. If she can satisfactorily arrange for a solitary journey to-day, I will take care that her companion shall join her before the end of the week; or sooner if possible."

Lady Anstruther was provoked; she thought the confessor troublesome and interfering, and secretly rejoiced that her own movements were free from any such control. Lucia sat perfectly passive. She could discover no precise cause for alarm; but the distant prospect of a confession being forced upon her, took from her all her remaining strength. She did not, however, dare raise an objection, and as Lady Anstruther prepared to go, she hurriedly murmured a few unintelligible words of regret, construed into annoyance at the unlooked-for postponement of her journey. Beatrice alone was pleased. It was true that Father Andrea was stern, but so he was always; and to her his manner was anxiously paternal.

"Most fortunate, is it not?" she said, turning to speak to Lucia.

But the words were thrown away, for, profiting by the slight confusion consequent upon the entrance of servants, the counter orders, and Lady Anstruther's departure, Lucia had escaped to her own chamber.

CHAPTER LXVI.

We must look again at the Grove, on the day preceding Father Andrea's appearance in London. There was a more natural appearance about the house and garden; an air of greater life, and, where the children were, of cheerfulness. Grace and Philip ran races in the garden, and little Juliet picked daisies upon the lawn, and Harriet sat under the trees with a book in her hand, and Margaret made the circuit of the gravel walk with Miss Debrett, and tried to reconcile her to the prospect of losing her best friends.

"For poor mamma's sake," she said, "I could wish it had been otherwise, but I am not sure for my own. All is changed now."

"Yes, my dear, certainly, as you say, all is changed. Your poor dear father! it came very sudden at last. But I don't see what you are to do anywhere else."

"My uncle thinks there is a house at Alton which would suit us. It would be a great comfort to be in his parish."

"A great comfort, indeed; but you will miss the garden; and this neighbourhood is so healthy, and—I won't complain, my love, indeed I won't; but what shall I do without you?" Miss Debrett's tears, always easily called forth, flowed rapidly.

"We shall only be sixteen miles off," said Margaret, endeavouring to forget her own griefs to console another's.

"A hundred you mean, as far as I can get at you! and bad roads,—three gates I know in the cross-road—and the expense. No, you are gone, and I had better make up my mind to it at once."

"And go away too," said Margaret, who had before tried to fix upon some plan of moderating Miss Debrett's distress, which had been vehement ever since the idea of a removal was made known.

"And where am I to go, my dear? I, who have not a friend in the world; not one but all of you; nor a relation either."

"Except Mrs. Duncan, at Eastlake," said Margaret.

"Ah! poor Anne Duncan!" A fit of perverseness had seized Miss Debrett, and she was rather provoked at being told that she was not absolutely friendless. "A very good woman Anne

Duncan is, but fidgetty; and only a cousin. Cousins go for nothing,—one has so many."

Margaret could scarcely refrain from a smile at the contradiction.

"Well," she answered, "if Eastlake will not do, we must come and see you as often as we can here."

"But it won't be the same, my dear; not at all the same."

"Not at all," repeated Margaret from her heart, and her eye wandered over the garden, and dwelt sorrowfully upon the well-known shrubs and flowers; and as the happy, thoughtless hours of her childhood arose to view, she forgot that she was walking with Miss Debrett, and fell into a melancholy dream of the past. Miss Debrett's plaintive tones soon awoke her.

"And when do you go, my dear? I do want to know everything, and you never tell me."

"Because I cannot. We are quite unsettled. Hardly anything is arranged yet. Poor mamma's spirits are very bad, and she cannot attend to business; and my uncle must leave us again to-morrow. He is here as often as he can be, but his parish requires his attention."

"Oh, then, Mr. Sutherland is with you now?"

"Yes, he came the day before yesterday, and George is to go back with him for a little change."

"Poor George! I hear he is looking very unwell; and somebody said he was to leave college. Is that true?"

"I cannot tell; nothing is decided," said Margaret, disliking to approach the subject.

"But it will be very bad for him if he is; he will be dreadfully disappointed."

"I am afraid so; but we are not sure it will be necessary, and we endeavour not to think about it."

"You must think, my dear; what can you do if you don't?"

"We try to remember that 'sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof,'" said Margaret, in an earnest tone.

"You are right there, of course; yet some things must be thought about; and how you are to manage this without thinking, I can't imagine."

"We are waiting for a letter from Mr. Dampier," said Margaret; "perhaps he will change his mind, and consent to help George at college, instead of putting him into the counting-house."

"I wish he may, Margaret, but I would not depend upon him. They are a curious race, the Dampiers. Very strange ways, I hear, he has, and his father, you know, was quite odd."

Margaret looked round, half hoping to see her uncle with a

letter in his hand. He had been disappointed in the morning, she told Miss Debrett, and had sent a special messenger to Alton, in the hope that Mr. Dampier's letter might have been directed there.

Mr. Sutherland did not appear until some minutes afterwards, and then he had no letter. The messenger had not returned: but he warned Margaret against being sanguine, as Mr. Dampier was not likely to change his mind.

"No, that I am sure of," said Miss Debrett; "so, my dear, perhaps it is better, as you said, not to think about it; and we will talk of something else. Do you know that Colonel Clive is laid up at Ashington, very ill?"

"Rather unwell, you mean, do you not?" inquired Mr. Sutherland. "I saw Mr. Harrison this morning, and he told me of it."

"Well! very ill, or very unwell, there does not seem much difference to me; at any rate he is very mopy, and not able to go out; and Mrs. St. Aubyn declares it is as much as she can do to amuse him."

"Poor man!" said Mr. Sutherland.

"Well! you say poor man, do you! and so do I. I don't mean to blame Agatha, dear child! but certainly she did manage to leave her husband very lonely. As Mrs. St. Aubyn observed, it was a thousand pities they ever married, if they are to go on in this way all their lives."

"Did Mrs. St. Aubyn say that really?" inquired Margaret.

"Yes, and a good deal more. To tell you the truth, Margaret, I suspect she is a little tired of nursing him. Men are troublesome when they are ill,—so fractious."

Margaret agreed, but she was not exactly thinking of what she said. Agatha was principally in her mind. A wife's place at such a time ought surely to be at her husband's side.

"Shall I find your mother in the house?" asked Miss Debrett, finding that the conversation languished.

"Yes; I will look for her, if you will wait here."

Miss Debrett declined the offer. It was rather an amusement to her to go from room to room, searching behind doors, and inquiring of every one where Mrs. Percival could possibly be. But in a short time this pleasure also would be taken from her. Her wishes reverted to Eastlake, and she almost decided that if Mrs. Percival went away from the Grove, she would accept her cousin Anne's proposal to live with her. Margaret and Mr. Sutherland, left alone, gave utterance to the ideas which were uppermost in both their minds.

"If Agatha could but see her duty!" said Margaret. "Now

there really seems an opening. Mrs. St. Aubyn could effect a reconciliation, I am sure."

"Are you? But I am not. Agatha's offence must be very unpardonable in a husband's eyes; and Colonel Clive's temper is not forgiving."

"My greatest fear is that they would separate again," said Margaret.

"I hope not that," replied her uncle; "Agatha has suffered: she is not as wilful as she was, and even pride might go some way towards rendering her forbearing. She is conscious that her position is humiliating. I mean to speak to her myself when I can find an occasion, so as to prepare the way for any future advances."

Margaret was glad that the burden was taken from her, but she had little or no hope that any good would result, her own efforts had proved so unsuccessful. She was going to express this, when Grace ran up to them with a letter, holding it out at first that it might be seen, and immediately hiding it behind her, and making them guess what she had brought, with childish ignorance of the annoyance she was inflicting by the delay.

"Give it me, please, Grace, dear," said Margaret, even then not allowing irritation to get the better of her habitual watchfulness. "It was brought from Alton, was it not?"

"Yes, only this minute. Humphries has just taken the mare into the stable."

Mr. Sutherland looked at the direction,—"It is from Mr. Dampier; and now we shall see." He broke the seal, and Margaret leant over him to read also. Both their faces assumed a grave look of disappointment as they went on. The letter was very short and very decisive. Mr. Dampier's determination was unchangeable. "He would take one of Dr. Percival's sons, either his godson George or the youngest boy Philip, educate him, and place him in his own office, but he would assist the family in no other way. He did not see the good of young men indulging fancies as to a profession; and if George were fool enough not to value the offer which was now made him, perhaps his little brother might be wiser."

"Then there is no hope at all!" exclaimed Margaret, as her rapid eye reached the last words, "he is condemned for life."

Mr. Sutherland did not reply till he had carefully re-perused every sentence; "Margaret, my dear, it is a disappointment; but we must not be ungrateful. Mr. Dampier promises a great deal, and we ought not to think upon second causes."

Mr. Sutherland became extremely grave, and said he would think upon the subject. It was on no account to be decided upon hastily, or even to be named to her mother.

"You are afraid of me," observed Margaret.

He hesitated for a moment, and then replied freely, "I confess I am afraid. Your mind is not yet fitted to guide others."

"I have given up all," said Margaret, sorrowfully: "yes," she repeated, "all: that which was dear to me as my own life."

"But have you forgotten? — are you firm?"

"Forgotten! no, never. Who could or would forget? Yet I pray daily to be strengthened."

Mr. Sutherland's countenance expressed but partial satisfaction, and Margaret was very uneasy. "I must be left to think by myself, my love," said her uncle, gently withdrawing himself from her; and Margaret, though full of eagerness, acknowledged that he was right in giving the idea careful consideration.

CHAPTER LXVII.

Late in the evening Margaret sat alone in the garden. The weather was intensely sultry; a scorching mist spread itself over the sky, and not a leaf on the trees, nor a blade of grass, stirred beneath a passing breeze. The unnatural calm seemed the precursor of some great change, and Margaret saw in it the type of her own life; the momentary quiet which she was then bearing, rather than enjoying, and the troubles and responsibilities which were threatening the future. Following her uncle's injunctions, she had not named her wishes to her mother; but Mrs. Percival had heard the results of the appeal to Mr. Dampier, and full of disappointment, and with a will but partially chastened to resignation, had spent an hour in discussing with Margaret and Agatha the most unfeasible projects for retaining George at college. Mrs. Percival was more ambitious of distinction than of wealth; and she had lately settled it as nearly certain that Mr. Dampier would enter into her views, pity her forlorn situation, and, after perhaps a little delay, undertake the expenses of George's college life, and put Philip into the merchant's office. Affliction had not rendered her less sanguine, and whenever it was proposed to her to listen to business, she postponed the subject by saying that it was useless to do anything until Mr. Dampier had given his definite answer

about the boys. If Mr. Sutherland warned her against expecting too much, a burst of grief followed, and, as Margaret told Miss Debrett, the family arrangements from this cause had remained in uncertainty. Poor Mrs. Percival was destined to disappointment in every case where she had rested her heart. Agatha's marriage had brought misery, and, in the eyes of many, disgrace. Dr. Percival's death, and Craven's extravagance, had put an end to all idea of her children being courted by the world; and now, the destruction of George's college prospects struck at the root of her last remaining hope. She felt the blow bitterly; but her grief was just such as to make Margaret see the greatest obstacles in the way of gaining her own object. The pride which was wounded for George would be equally wounded for her; and Margaret's spirit of endurance was sorely tried as she thought of the difficulties which lay in her path. In some seasons of affliction, self-sacrifice is the only comfort which seems left us. It becomes a pleasure, the greater from its magnitude; and Margaret, when thinking of the new course of life which she had chalked out for herself, found satisfaction in imagining its hardships; for they were to be borne, not for herself, but her brother. In a fit of melancholy enthusiasm she longed to enter upon her duties at once, and she could herself see no objections that were not to be easily overruled. Her mother would go to Alton; Agatha would be her companion; and the education of the children would be an interest in Mrs. Percival's new and desolate life. With Mr. Sutherland constantly near them, they would be in safe hands. All seemed ordered well, except her mother's possible objections and her uncle's doubts. Margaret could not view the latter in the same light with Mr. Sutherland. If she banished all perplexing questions, studiously avoided Romish books, and undertook to teach only according to the teaching of the English Church, it seemed that no harm could possibly arise. She could not say that her mind was clear; that there were not moments—hours even—when religion seemed a chaos; but these moments were of less frequent recurrence, and she could almost invariably trace them to some remembrance of the Countess Novera.

When the intense wish arose to see Beatrice, to hear from her, at least to have the mystery of her silence cleared up, then all that had been connected with her came again to view. Margaret no longer strove to forget. She revisited in imagination the scenes which she had known with her; stood once more in the church of St. Ouen; wandered through the park at Henningsley;

lingered upon the terrace; sat by the Countess reading or conversing; or, dwelling upon the event which had the most impressed her with awe, watched over the dying bed of Rhoda Newbolt; and, in the stillness of the hours which followed, received the Countess's first open acknowledgment of her affection; and insensibly from such recollections slided into others more dangerous to her peace of mind and the stability of her religious faith. It was uncertainty which mainly contributed to foster Margaret's regret, and with it her doubts. If the separation had been mutually declared final, she would have striven more earnestly to regulate her mind; but now the idea was for ever haunting her that some further explanation was at hand; that the Countess must expect to see her again; that she would insist upon doing so when she returned to Henningsley; and with this hope her affection was unconsciously fed. That same day, twelve months before, had been passed at Henningsley. Margaret remembered it particularly from a severe remark of Father Andrea's upon some glaring instance of political interference in the English Church, which she had noted down at the time. In the course of the afternoon, in looking over some papers, she had met with it, and now it came again to her recollection, as associated with Mr. Sutherland's fears of the state of her mind, and her own inward consciousness that the volcano of doubt was not extinguished, though it slumbered.

The still evening was unbroken by any of the usual sounds of a large family. The children were gone out with Mr. Sutherland; and George and Agatha had persuaded her mother to take a drive. It was a sad request, for it was prefaced with—

"It is as well to take advantage of the opportunity whilst we have it."

Margaret preferred solitude: it was not often that she could enjoy it, and there were many things to be planned, for which she had in general but little leisure; yet her thoughts involuntarily wandered from all. She had lost the power of fixing her attention, and only the memories of her childhood, or the recollections of past happiness, had the power to chain her ideas for more than a few moments. She remained a long time lost in a quiet dreaming reverie; but it was disturbed at last. The glass door by which the garden was entered from the house was opened, and two persons appeared. One was a servant,—the other Margaret did not see very clearly. It was a man dressed in black, who followed close behind. Margaret rose, not liking to be interrupted, and annoyed at the liberty which had been taken; but the servant

approached as if seeking her, and Margaret looked more narrowly. It seemed impossible that she could see correctly, but the servant moved aside, and with an extended hand, and a countenance in which sternness had given place to cordial sympathy and pleasure, Father Andrea came forward to greet her. Margaret's first blush of surprise and delight told the welcome which her words could not express, for the bitterness of all that she had suffered since they parted came with a sudden rush to her heart, and she burst into tears. Father Andrea waited in silence, until she had recovered herself, and then said: "I was afraid I might see you thus. I felt that it might be intruding; but I was at Henningsley for one night, and I could not resist the temptation of inquiring for you, and when I heard you were here and alone, I hoped I might venture to come to you. Will you pardon me?"

Margaret smiled through her tears, as she replied, "It was pleasure as well as grief. I have so longed to hear of you and of Beatrice."

A restraint of manner followed this expression of feeling, and the confessor noticed it instantly.

"I can tell you but little of the Countess Novera," he replied. "I have not seen her for several weeks; business has detained me from her, and our correspondence has not been frequent. She has been ill, and is better; but this you know, probably, as well as I do."

"I know nothing," answered Margaret, sadly.

She paused, in hopes that the confessor would throw some further light upon the Countess's present situation; but Father Andrea looked vexed. There had been a reserve with regard to Margaret in the letters which he had received from Beatrice; but they were short, and of late had evidently been written in suffering. The Countess was impetuous, but not capricious, and he had imagined no cause for this beyond accidental circumstances.

"Nothing!" he said. "Yet I cannot wonder at it. Your time and thoughts must have been fully engrossed. But I trust you can give me some comfort to carry back to the Countess; that your mother and your family are in some degree recovered?"

"It will be no comfort to her now," answered Margaret, "to hear of me in any way."

Father Andrea's face expressed his astonishment. "Your words are unintelligible," he said. "Surely, no misunderstanding—no fault—"

"Fault! no, not in her; I do not blame her, Father,"—at the word "Father," the confessor's countenance lighted up with satis-

When last we parted she desired a fuller confidence than I had given as to the affairs of my family; and when I would have told her all, the opportunity was denied me. My unhappy letter must, in some way unknown to myself, have added to her displeasure. Father, will you intercede for me? My peace of mind is in your hands."

"Rather, in the hands of God, my daughter. These earthly cares can be of little weight while the great interests of the soul are at stake."

"You think me wrong; you condemn me," said Margaret.

"I am an erring mortal; I would condemn no one. But may your pardon be sealed before the last great day!"

Margaret trembled violently. "Father," she said, "I dare not talk to you longer; it is against the will and the advice of the best and wisest of earthly friends."

"And what if compliance with such advice were against the will of God?" His tone was solemn, and his eye searching.

"You would judge mercifully if you knew all," said Margaret, in anguish: "it is a horrible ordeal through which I have passed, and it may not yet be over. But I must act. Now, if I had the power, I have no time to think. A change has passed over my family which has entirely altered their prospects, and my thoughts must be given to them."

"And you must leave your home?"

"My home, my friends, all may probably be different; but if peace is at my heart, I can be thankful for every trial."

"And they say, 'Peace, peace, where there is no peace,'" repeated the confessor in an under-tone. Margaret rose from her seat very much agitated, and stood as if desiring that he should go; but his eyes were riveted upon the ground, and he did not notice her movements. "And you have not heard since from the Countess?" he inquired, suddenly looking up.

"Neither by message nor letter. It seems that I could not thus have treated her."

"And you parted in anger?"

"No, not in anger, but misunderstanding. It was my own folly which caused me to practise a reserve; but it should not have continued."

Father Andrea betrayed an unusual embarrassment of manner, as he said quietly, "that which interests the Countess Novera interests me also."

"If you would hear," replied Margaret, with eagerness; "if you would carry back to Beatrice the full particulars of all my

past and present difficulties, my mind would be relieved from a heavy burden. I should feel that she understood me, and I could rest satisfied in the possession of her love and her esteem."

"Neither could ever have failed you, my daughter, believe me but, if I might, I would hear all that you can tell."

Margaret sat down again, and striving to forget the sever gravity of the Romish priest, and to fancy herself alone wit Beatrice, narrated the circumstances which she believed had n been made satisfactorily clear to the Countess. She mentione Agatha, and the hope which she now sometimes entertained of a ultimate reconciliation with her husband, through the interferen of Mrs. St. Aubyn. "It was not a subject," she said, "up which she would have troubled Father Andrea; but it had tak a singularly firm hold of the Countess's attention, and it woul she hoped, be satisfactory to her to hear it." The confessor's fa softened in its expression as Margaret grew more unreserved; showed an interest in her communications not for Beatrice alo but for himself; and Margaret insensibly was led on to s greater freedom. She had seemed to herself lonely and unp tected before, thrown, as it were, upon the world to struggle her family; but now, as she pronounced the word "Father," l heart clung to the associations connected with the name, almost she could have believed herself conversing with one, whom relationship as well as reverence had bound her. Whe length she spoke of her own great loss and her future pl Father Andrea's manner became winning in its tenderness sympathy. The object which she had now at heart was on which principle would have forbidden him to co-operate. could not assist, even if it had been in his power, in the educa of a minister of a different communion; but he did not refe this difference in the questions which he put to Margaret; before the simple story of her trials was ended, he was in po sion of her most cherished wishes, as well as of her secret f At length, when all was told, Margaret became aware how pletely she had been thrown off her guard; how unlike her versation had been to that which she would previously supposed it possible to hold with Father Andrea. Had Sutherland been in his place she could scarcely have been unreserved. She repented; but it was too late to recede. F Andrea had gained his point, and was now acquainted wit the difficulties and temptations through which he might ho renew and retain, in spite of herself, his influence over her.

"The Countess Novera can have heard little indeed," he

"if she has any feelings for you but those of respect and affection. There must have been some great misapprehension of your meaning."

"I was very miserable when I wrote to her," answered Margaret; "and I cannot answer for my words. I have tried to remember them, but I may mistake. One thing she could not have doubted—my love."

"And this letter was never named to me," said the confessor, rather speaking to himself than to his companion.

"Then she has utterly cast me off," continued Margaret. "But I have no right to murmur; I could not have continued a correspondence."

"There must be a mistake; the Countess could not act so," said the confessor, in the same musing tone. In a louder voice, he added: "You are sure your letter was safely delivered?"

"Quite sure. I gave the order myself, and heard that it was executed."

"I have known cases of great forgetfulness at Henningsley," said Father Andrea.

"The fault, if fault there is, cannot lie there," replied Margaret. "The Signorina Fontana received the letter from my messenger, and promised to deliver it. No, it is too certain that Beatrice has received it." Margaret's manner was quite calm, for she had hope now that, through the medium of Father Andrea, any misapprehension of her conduct on the part of the Countess would be removed. The confessor, on the contrary, was evidently more than ever perplexed. Uneasy thoughts seemed arising which he was wishing to conceal. He mentioned Lucia's name, and directly afterwards, as if not venturing to own what was in his mind, said hastily: "Was it your own servant who went?"

"Yes, one we can thoroughly trust. But you are disturbing yourself needlessly, Father."

"I would see him," said the confessor, not regarding the observation.

"If you will, certainly; but the case is extremely simple. You must remember we parted with something of distrust; at least I am sure it was so with Beatrice."

"The Countess Novera is not fickle," said the confessor, resuming the severity of manner which was natural to him; "and the interests at stake were not earthly interests. I would inquire into this business myself, if possible."

Margaret left him immediately, for she stood too much in awe of him to remonstrate; and whilst she went to summon the

man-servant, Father Andrea brooded over the painful suspicion which had arisen in his mind. The Countess's conduct appeared to him inexplicable, if she had really received the confession which Margaret had just made to him. The hope of so many months to be at once destroyed, and without a struggle,—no mention of the subject to him who was so interested in it. It could not be. But the letter had been sent and delivered to Lucia—there came the surmise which caused the frown on Father Andrea's brow. Lucia's jealous temper might urge her to any act by which she could hope to diminish the Countess's affection for Margaret. The letter might have been kept back. Father Andrea rejected the idea when first it presented itself; but it seemed less unreasonable on further consideration. At any rate he would inquire: if he did her injustice, the injustice was confined to his own breast; and he would then at once seek the Countess and represent to her the cruelty and caprice of which she had been guilty; and the sin, for to him it seemed no less, of casting away the prospect of Margaret's conversion, without giving him the opportunity of making one more effort for it. But Father Andrea's meditations were not allowed to continue unbroken. Children's tones were heard in the house; a merry laugh in the hall, the door of which was open; and then a single voice speaking authoritatively. Father Andrea saw two or three little figures pass up a winding staircase, and before he could determine whether to wait where he then was until Margaret came back, or to return alone and apologise for his intrusion, Mr. Sutherland entered the garden alone. His dress and manner could not be mistaken. Father Andrea was certain who it must be. The impulse of a gentleman made him step forward instantly to offer his excuses and explanations; but Mr. Sutherland's start, almost of horror, as he drew near, brought the remembrance of the unpleasant light in which his presence there must be regarded.

"I would apologise," he said, lifting his hat from his head with the most dignified courtesy, "for an intrusion which must appear unaccountable; but as Miss Percival's friend and the friend of the Countess Novera, I have been admitted to a short interview."

Mr. Sutherland's bow was coldly distant. Pain, surprise, and indignation were struggling in his breast. "I believe I have the honour of speaking to the Countess Novera's confessor," he said, evading any allusion to Margaret. "I was not aware that any of her family were now in this neighbourhood."

"For one night only. I hope to be in London to-morrow, and

I could not resist the wish of carrying back my own report of Miss Percival and the family."

"My sister and my niece are much indebted to the Countess for her inquiries."

Even Father Andrea's ready tact failed him at this moment, and he knew not how to continue the awkward conversation. Mr. Sutherland expressed some regret that the confessor should be kept waiting. "Margaret was probably detained in the house; he would send for her."

"On no account; Father Andrea was in no haste; he had seen Miss Percival, and expected her to return. If Mr. Sutherland would permit him, he could wait with perfect patience. He only feared that he might be intruding."

This, it was hoped, might be taken as a suggestion for Mr. Sutherland to go; but no earthly power would have induced Mr. Sutherland at that instant to leave Magaret within reach of a further private interview with the Romish priest. Father Andrea recovered his ease of manner, and conversed for some minutes readily upon the light topics of the day. His words flowed smoothly, sometimes eloquently, and the union of satire, earnestness, and deep thought, which his observations betrayed, alarmed Mr. Sutherland. No wonder that such a mind had gained an influence over Margaret; and now, how long had they been together? He looked round repeatedly, wondering why Margaret did not return; but Father Andrea appeared regardless of the time; and when at length Margaret came towards him, but without the servant, he continued talking with an air of complete unconcern. Margaret and Mr. Sutherland looked at each other for a moment. Fear and anxiety were depicted on the countenance of the former; but ingenuousness was there also. Whether the interview with Father Andrea had afforded her pleasure or pain, it was evidently not of her seeking.

"You have not brought your witness," said Father Andrea, lightly, noticing Margaret's confusion, and anxious to relieve it. Then, turning to Mr. Sutherland, he explained, as if the subject were but a trifle, that there was some mystery about a lost letter which he hoped to have unravelled.

"The man was gone out," Margaret said; "it was very unfortunate."

"Less so perhaps than you think. If I may see him to-morrow before nine o'clock, it will do equally well."

He held out his hand to wish her good-bye. Mr. Sutherland was indignant, for he was convinced that the confessor's manner

was a mask. "The Countess Novera, is not, I presume, about to return to Henningsley?" he said.

"Not yet: her plans are uncertain."

"Then, Margaret, you had better send a message, if you wish to do so. Your home will probably be changed before the Countess is again in this neighbourhood."

The coldness of Mr. Sutherland's words was little in accordance with his feelings. He could scarcely bear to look at Margaret, knowing all that she must be suffering. Margaret found it difficult to reply, and Father Andrea, in a tone of great compassion, said, "Miss Percival is fully aware that the Countess Novera will require no assurances of remembrance. She can never forget."

"Neither will my niece; but the events of life are wisely ordered, and we must submit to them."

Margaret's glance was reproachful; but Mr. Sutherland had purposely turned away his face. Father Andrea would willingly have given Margaret the hope of hearing the result of his inquiry concerning the letter, yet he did not dare. He saw that Mr. Sutherland was resolute in putting an end to every prospect of a continued intercourse; but he hoped to throw him off his guard by appearing to be indifferent. He again raised his hat from his head and bowed politely; and the shake of the hand with which he took leave of Margaret was apparently that of a common acquaintance; but Margaret felt the warm pressure, and it went to her heart. He was standing at the garden-gate, and Mr. Sutherland had walked away when she was tempted to indulge in one more parting word, and followed him. Mr. Sutherland watched them; but they were together for a minute only; yet in that short time Father Andrea had found opportunity to say, "Daughter, it is written, 'Whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven.' Think of this, and pray that you may understand it."

CHAPTER LXVIII.

MARGARET returned to her uncle, looked up in his face with an air of childlike candour and simplicity, and said:—"The meeting was as unexpected to me as to you."

"I was sure of it, Margaret; who would not trust you?"

"Yet it has given me pleasure, great pleasure," replied Margaret.

"Doubtless it has. For that reason I could find it in my heart to be thankful that it has been granted you."

"And you can perceive his goodness, his high intellect?"

"Yes, and your danger."

Mr. Sutherland looked very unhappy, and Margaret was too sincere to give him false comfort. She knew that Father Andrea's visit had rekindled the slumbering flame.

"Margaret," continued Mr. Sutherland, after a silence of some moments, "will you tell me all that passed between yourself and this Romish priest?"

Margaret had no hesitation in complying. If she had been incautious in her unreserve, yet conscience acquitted her of anything beyond the impulse which a young girl would naturally feel to speak of her trials to one whom she highly reverenced. Mr. Sutherland listened with considerable anxiety while Margaret repeated all, even the concluding words; and when she had ended, he said: "You think, of course, my dear Margaret, that all this is clear and simple, involving no hidden meaning?"

"Yes, certainly. A hidden meaning! You could not do Father Andrea such injustice as to suppose him capable of it."

"All hidden meanings are not sinful, Margaret. Father Andrea's meaning is, I am ready to believe, good; yet I would not trust you with him,—and he will see you again."

"I gave him no hope of it," replied Margaret.

"But you expressed pleasure at his coming; you told him the secret history of your family; and you would send no final message to the Countess, although I gave you the opportunity."

"I saw no necessity for it," answered Margaret: "and words failed me."

"Then what will you do if the temptation should occur again? and it will do so; neither the Countess nor the confessor will thus give you up."

Margaret's heart throbbed with pleasure: but a pang of self-reproach followed instantly.

"The path before you seems fair," continued Mr. Sutherland, in a tone of eager expostulation, very unlike his usual quietness; "there are few dangers to be seen, and you have confidence in your own stability of purpose; but at no moment of your life,—no, not even when you were in daily communication with Henningsley, were you ever more near the brink of the precipice."

"You think me weak," replied Margaret; "and I am weak, but not utterly unstable."

"My dear Margaret, you are unstable, because you do not see the evil against which you are to guard. Whilst Romanism is presented to you in the form in which it is exhibited by the Countess and her confessor, you will never see it in its true light; and until you have become a dutiful daughter of the English Church, in your heart as well as your actions, you will never comprehend the sin of forsaking her."

"It is true," said Margaret; "I am acting upon faith,—upon faith in your assurances."

"If I were to leave you, and Father Andrea were to be with you, you would learn to act upon his.—Have I not cause to fear?"—His tone of sorrow cut Margaret to the heart.

"I think you may depend upon me," she said; "hitherto I have not disobeyed."

"But do you not see, Margaret, even from the few words which passed to-night, how they will try to work upon you? If any means of renewing the intercourse should be found, they will tamper with your conscience; and when conscience is perverted, there is scarcely any hope."

"We can have no surer guide," observed Margaret.

"Yet our Saviour himself says, 'the time cometh when whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service.' Conscience is a safe guide when it tells us what we ought not to do; but it may err fatally when it would teach us what we are to do. Margaret, as you value your eternal salvation, I warn you against putting yourself again within reach of temptation."

Margaret was frightened, but she was not convinced. "I will not conceal from you," she said, "that I cannot view this subject as you do. I can so far agree with you that I think it better to remain where I now am, until I see more evident reasons to distrust the English Church. I hope and believe that I am safe; and, whatever it may cost me, I trust never again to place myself in the hands of Romanists; but to say that I can look upon a change of religion from a conscientious principle as a great sin, is more than I can yet allow."

"Conscientious principle! There, Margaret, is the stumbling-block. Conscience is in each man's breast. A good man utters a hasty word, and his conscience accuses him bitterly. A bad man ruins his neighbour by slander, and his conscience is silent. Is there no law by which both shall be judged, except conscience?"

Margaret gave a silent assent.

"I would warn you earnestly, solemnly, upon this subject," continued Mr. Sutherland, his voice growing husky with agitation; "because conscience is the plea upon which the most fatal crimes have been committed. God has given to man an external revelation, a law of perfect holiness and truth; if our consciences agree with that law, we are safe; if they do not, the disagreement is in itself a sin for which we shall surely be called to account, according as we have had it in our power to learn the truth."

"But surely, surely," said Margaret, distressed at the contradiction between the opposite warnings of her uncle and the confessor,—"those who are ignorant, as I am, may hope for pardon if they err."

"We will consider," replied Mr. Sutherland; "and remember, I am dealing only with your individual case. Each person must be judged by himself. Whatever extenuations there may be for others, God must know, and must acquit or condemn in perfect wisdom."

"But for me?" said Margaret; "tell me why you speak so earnestly?"

Mr. Sutherland's countenance assumed an expression of deep awful thought. It seemed as if he almost feared to give utterance to that which was in his mind; but as Margaret turned to him for an explanation of his silence, he said: "Margaret, we are accustomed to speak of the judgment which we must undergo, or, at least to allude to it often, but I think we scarcely realise it. So I own it is with me. Lately, I have endeavoured to imagine the plea upon which a person in your circumstances leaving the English Church might attempt to justify himself before the tribunal of God. I have endeavoured to do so the more carefully," he added, "because I have felt that the hour might arrive when such a plea might be made by you." The last words were almost inaudible. "Think, Margaret," he said, recovering himself, "think of that time. There will be no power of false palliation then—nothing wilfully concealed; the secrets of our hearts will be open, and heaven or hell will be before us. When the question shall then be asked why you left the Church of your fathers, what will be your answer?"

"I could not leave it whilst I believed it to be a true Church," said Margaret, in a trembling voice.

"But we will imagine that you did believe it—that you had brought yourself to believe it; and you might then say, 'It is true that I was baptised into the English Church; I was taught that it was a branch of the Catholic Church; I was warned that to

leave it would be schism; I was instructed in creeds, and catechisms, and articles of faith, all which I saw to be in accordance with the inspired Word of God. I heard that the English clergy derived their descent from the Apostles; and I knew, from my own experience, and from the undoubted testimony of others, that the prayers of the Church, her ordinances, festivals, and fasts, were, through the grace of God, able to build me up in a life of holiness. The more I assimilated myself in spirit to the English Church, the more I approached the standard of perfection which the Bible held out. But this was not enough. The people of England were unmindful of their Church: they neglected her ordinances and despised her commands. The clergy preached different doctrines, and there was little uniformity in public worship. The state kept the Church in subjection, and no one raised a voice against it. Parishes were frequently neglected; sacraments were by many persons scarcely allowed to be a means of grace; discipline was a mere name: it seemed as if the Church must soon become extinct. Because other of her children were disobedient, I was disobedient likewise; because each followed that which was right in his own eyes, I too threw off the yoke. Instead of remaining where the providence of God had placed me, and endeavouring to carry out the principles of the Church in my own practice, I sought for that which pleased me better; and I examined into the claims of the communion of Rome.' Margaret, have I said one word which is not true?"

"No," replied Margaret, in a humble voice: "these are indeed the difficulties which have staggered me—which do often stagger me still."

"And because of these difficulties, do you think that conscience will justify you before God in breaking the unity of the Catholic Church, and being guilty of the sin of schism?"

"It could not, if the claims of Rome were not true," said Margaret.

"Then we will look at the other side. We will suppose that you are enumerating the inducements which Rome held out. You might say: 'There was in my country another Church professing to have a claim upon my allegiance. This claim rested upon the supremacy of a foreign bishop: the claim, though of long standing, had been refuted continually, and I had no means of inquiring into it myself. I saw nothing about it in the Bible. Good and learned men declared that it had never been admitted by the primitive Church, but I would not listen to them. I admired the power and antiquity of this Church—I liked its magnificence—I was

astonished at its energy—I was very weak and ignorant, and above all things needed guidance; yet I took upon myself to leave the teachers whom God had given me, and to choose new ones. The prayers suited my enthusiastic fancy, the solemn services were congenial to my taste. I knew that if the Bishop of Rome were not the head of the Church, all in England who obeyed him must be schismatics; yet I put the question aside. I had formed a theory in my own mind of what the Catholic Church ought to be, and because the Romish Church, as I saw it working immediately around me (though I was told it was very different elsewhere), approached more nearly to this theory than the English, therefore conscience told me I ought to join it.' Margaret, will that plea justify you?"

"You are inclined to be severe," said Margaret.

"I wish only to be just. In this instance justice must also be the greatest mercy. You can never know, Margaret, how I have loved you; and if affection could be a call upon you for caution, I would kneel to you to entreat that for my sake you would watch against the snares of Romanism; but there is one rock, and one only, on which to rest—eternal truth. Once more, as you value your eternal salvation, beware how you forsake it."

Margaret was touched by this appeal, and as Mr. Sutherland rose to return to the house, she said—"If I know myself, in any degree, you shall have no cause to fear."

CHAPTER LXIX.

Father Andrea had gained much by his interview with Margaret, but not all that he desired; for Mr. Sutherland's appearance had prevented him from again touching upon the question of religion. There would, he saw, be a considerable difficulty in keeping up the acquaintance under the present circumstances of the family; and it seemed doubtful whether, from the state of the Countess's health, the opportunity of personal intercourse would much longer be afforded him. But Father Andrea was a man of determined resolution; his heart was given to his Church, and his interest in Margaret was considerable. Now, more than ever, he resolved to win her at all hazards. Wherever he might be, in England or in Italy, he would still persevere, so long as the way

seemed in the least degree open; and, as a first step, he would inquire into the cause of the Countess's estrangement. But little light was thrown upon the origin of her silence by the confessor's examination of the man-servant the next morning. The letter was declared to have been given to Lucia; and when the man turned to look back after leaving her, he said that he had perceived her standing under the tree with it in her hand: but this was nothing more than what Margaret had stated, and Father Andrea secretly blamed himself for being more inclined to suspect Lucia of dishonourable conduct, than to imagine that Beatrice could be hasty or capricious. His journey to London was performed as speedily as possible; for it had been mentioned to him that Lucia intended to go with Lady Anstruther into Devonshire, and he was anxious to see her before she set off. The idea of having been partial, even in thought, was painful to him; yet when they met, his affection for the Countess made him forget that he had been justifying her at Lucia's expense. He saw only that she was ill; and Lucia's evident embarrassment roused anew his latent suspicion. When the slight confusion attendant on the departure of Lady Anstruther was over, his look of disturbance was more plainly perceived by the Countess. He made a remark upon Lucia's absence; and refusing any offer of refreshment, began to inquire into the cause of her haste. "Why had she not waited to see him, when she knew that he was intending immediately to return; and that he would have taken her himself into Devonshire on any day she might afterwards have named? It was not the arrangement which he had expected from her."

The Countess explained; but the explanation seemed only to increase the confessor's annoyance. He sat for some time in moody silence. The Countess took up some work; but she could not help watching him. His brows were closely knit, and there was a regular, yet impatient movement of his foot upon the floor, which was a sign of great discomposure. Once or twice Beatrice was upon the point of addressing him; but, much as she loved him, she was at all times afraid of intruding on his reveries. When at length the confessor broke silence suddenly, it was with another and a more anxious remark, upon the alteration in her appearance. "I can never think that England agrees with you, my daughter," he said.

"Neither do the physicians, father. If I had listened to them, I should be on the eve of a journey now with Lady Anstruther."

"But you did not name this to me in your letters."

"Because I knew it would be impossible to set off so soon."

"I see no impossibility if it is necessary. You might go alone, and I would follow."

"Nay, father," said Beatrice, affectionately, "that must never be. It would make me miserable. You have been absent already too long; and I have so few to love me now."

The shade of sorrow which rested on the Countess's pale features deepened as she spoke; and Father Andrea grew impatient at the mutual reserve. Yet he did not venture to introduce Margaret's name abruptly. Beatrice was so thin, her eye so bright, her transparent cheek so hectic in its hue, he saw that excitement of any kind must be injurious. "I should have been here yesterday," he remarked, putting on an air of unconcern, "but I was induced to make a circuit in my journey. I slept one night at Henningsley."

"Henningsley!" The Countess smiled for an instant; then relapsed into melancholy, and said no more.

"Yes, I thought it uncertain how long we might be detained in town, and, as I had the opportunity, it seemed unwise not to take advantage of it. I found all things going on well. The school-house is progressing, and the people are pleased. I saw none of your friends—except"—he looked at her fixedly, and added,—"Miss Percival."

Beatrice started, and the work fell from her hands.

"I had a long conversation with her, my daughter."

"With her! Margaret herself! but it can do me no good."

She tried to appear perfectly calm; but the confessor was not deceived.

"We will not practise concealment with each other any longer," he said, with more of severity than before; "there has been too much already. It was neither good for yourself, nor kind to Miss Percival, to keep from me the knowledge of your separation."

"Forgive me, father," said the Countess in a tone of meek wretchedness, "I could not bear to weary you with my disappointment, and you could not help me. I trusted unwisely, and I have been taught my error. It is the common fate of human friendship."

"My daughter, in trusting to Miss Percival, you trusted to one who is pure, and upright, and devoted in her affection. In casting her off, you have given up as fair a hope of winning a soul to God, as ever has been granted to a mortal being."

The Countess grew very pale; it seemed that a sudden light had dawned upon her. "Father," she said, "in that respect I may have erred. Yet, I had reason to think that Margaret was

not earnestly seeking after truth; and I can scarcely tell how I could have acted differently. It was she who withdrew herself from me; who became suddenly constrained; wrote to me coldly; suffered me to depart without one word of kindness; and has never since addressed to me a single explanation. The De Lisles may be proud; but surely their daughter cannot be blamed, if, in such a case, she owns herself indignant?"

"And the letter, the confession of misery, the acknowledgment that for conscience' sake she must give up all she loved?"

The Countess looked at him wildly. "The letter—the confession—Oh, Margaret!"

Bewildering fears took possession of her mind: suspicion that she had herself been unjust; a momentary horror lest Margaret had been untrue in her interview with Father Andrea; and a consciousness that, under whatever provocation, she had acted unjustifiably in sacrificing the prospect of her conversion, by not informing the confessor of all that had passed.

"You speak enigmas," she added.

"The events of life must ever be enigmas to those who ruin their own happiness by wilfulness and impetuosity," said Father Andrea. "Before I explain myself farther, I would hear the circumstances which have led to this fatal separation."

The Countess's proud spirit for a moment rebelled against the command; but her habitual submission to the confessor prevailed. "You are angry with me, father," she said: "it may be justly; but you shall know all."

Father Andrea bent his head in assent, but made no observation; whilst Beatrice narrated from the commencement the story of Lucia's jealous fancies; her own struggles against the insinuations; her doubts of Margaret, and the symptoms which had tended to confirm them; and, at length, the unintentional test to which she had subjected her, and the unaccountable change of manner which had followed.

"These things may appear trifles to you, father," she said:—"mere suspicions; but how could I do otherwise than I have done? How could I write to Margaret freely when in my heart I doubted her sincerity? My fingers would have refused to act. I could not have penned the deceitful words; neither could I confess my distrust. If it were unfounded, it would have served only to separate us more decidedly; for she would have deemed me fanciful and weak-minded. If it were correct, her excuses would have exasperated me. I had but one course to take—silence. Margaret might have written, and she did not."

The Countess ended, and leant her head upon the pillow, faint from excitement and exertion. Father Andrea was frightened, and would have postponed any further conversation; but she insisted upon continuing it.

"Nothing will do me good till I have heard what you can tell me," she said. "Prove to me that Margaret is true. But you cannot," she added, seeing that the confessor delayed answering.

"My daughter, such proof in words only may be unavailing. Had you seen Miss Percival, as I did yesterday, bowed down by sorrow for the loss of her father——"

"Her father!—Dr. Percival dead!" interrupted the Countess, making an effort to rise.

Father Andrea laid his hand upon her, to force her to be still. "Dr. Percival is dead, my daughter. His family are in distress; not only of mind, but from pecuniary embarrassments. They are about to leave their house, and Miss Percival is intending to give up the comforts of her family, and offer herself as a governess, that she may find the means of providing for her brother's college education. In the midst of these many trials there is one peculiarly her own—that you have cast her off; that you parted from her without confessing the causes of your secret annoyance; and that, when, upon the positive commands of her uncle, a minister of the Establishment, she wrote to you in great distress of mind, to say that she dared not risk a continued intercourse with you, lest she should be converted to the faith of our Holy Church, you acquiesced without one word of commiseration. Miss Percival, my daughter, blames herself for reserve; your own conscience will tell you where the blame really rests."

The Countess had listened to this explanation without the least sign of agitation, except the quivering of her lips. When the confessor ceased speaking, she gently motioned to him with her hand to ring the bell; but her voice was inarticulate. Father Andrea reproached himself severely for his incautiousness:—the communication had been too sudden and startling. He stood, looking in silence at the marble features of the unhappy Countess, until Lauretta appeared; and then Beatrice, although with great effort, whispered—

"Father, you will believe me; that letter never reached me."

"My daughter, I knew, I was certain of it; but we will speak more of it by and by;" and bidding Lauretta summon him when her mistress should wish to see him again, Father Andrea departed to seek for the truth from Lucia.

CHAPTER LXX.

THE suggestion offered itself to Lucia, when, for a moment, she feared that Father Andrea might be suspicious of the truth, to deny having any knowledge of Margaret's letter; but this was directly seen to be dangerous: for she might be convicted of having received it by the testimony of the servant. Lucia was now not only horror-struck at the prospect of the exposure of her guilt, but humiliated by the recollection of it. She fancied herself penitent, though she was not so; for she would still, if she could, have gratified her jealousy; but she had been betrayed into a mean, contemptible action, and her self-respect was lessened. We are all liable to this error, imagining that we are grieved at a fault, when we are only grieved at having done something to lower ourselves in our own estimation. Real penitence admits no lingering of sin; it searches into the secret recesses of the heart; humbles itself in solitude before God; and is thankful even whilst distressed, at the prospect of censure. Still Lucia could not really believe that Father Andrea had obtained a clue to her secret; and when she was summoned to his presence, she strove to rally her failing courage by supposing that he merely wished to learn some particulars of the Countess's illness. Father Andrea began by these inquiries, and Lucia was thrown off her guard. She told him all that had been lately passing, and in her extreme desire to know when she might consider herself safe, hinted a wish to follow Lady Anstruther the next day, if convenient. The confessor did not immediately reply. Lucia watched him; but saw nothing alarming. After a few moments, however, he said, without noticing her inquiry—

"I was at Henningsley yesterday."

In spite of herself, Lucia felt her countenance changing; but the confessor was not looking at her, and she recovered. Yet her answer was short — "I am glad of that for the Countess's sake."

"I was at Henningsley," again repeated Father Andrea.

This time he looked up, and Lucia's colour went and came very quickly. She tried to turn the conversation by another allusion to Lady Anstruther; but Father Andrea was not a person to be diverted from his object. His eye rested upon her, and he added, "I saw Miss Percival."

Lucia stood motionless; but she was not practised in deception; and when she said, "I hope you found her well," her voice shook.

Father Andrea, as before, made no direct comment or reply; but went on again — "I had a conversation with her of some length."

Lucia could scarcely support this torture. Father Andrea was always direct, often abrupt, in his conversation. He was particularly so now; yet it might be only manner. The confessor made a few observations upon the melancholy state of the family, and the necessity of their removal from the Grove. Lucia tried to enter into the subject, and succeeded tolerably well; but Father Andrea saw through her efforts, and just as she had expressed peculiar regret at Margaret's trials, he said very quietly, and as if in continuation of the topic —

"Miss Percival sent a letter to the Countess before she went away, which you took; what did you do with it?"

The tone was so entirely unconcerned, that Lucia could not in the least comprehend it. The temptation to deceive, if possible, was more than she could withstand. "I don't remember — I forget."

The confessor's indignation burst all bounds; he started from his seat, and his eyes flashed. "Daughter," he said, "I have borne with you too long. If you have sinned in this matter, you will do wisely to confess it."

The stillness which followed was awful to Lucia. The possible chances of escape, by persisting in denial, presented themselves instantaneously to her mind; but they were rejected. She sunk on her knees before him; but Father Andrea bade her instantly rise.

"Kneel not to me, my daughter; kneeling is the attitude of a penitent. Let me hear the truth."

Lucia drew herself up proudly. Shame was mingled with hatred of Margaret, and anger at the discovery. "Reject me, father," she exclaimed, "if you will; and blame me. I have sinned; but I am not without excuse. I was scorned — neglected — supplanted; and I turned to revenge myself on the adder that stung me. Who would not have done the same?"

The confessor did not attempt to interrupt her. He stood in a patient, listening attitude, and she went on — "You have told me oftentimes, father, that I was jealous. The Countess Novera told me the same. You warned me, and advised me; and then you placed me in the way of temptation. In my own country I was near to the Countess's heart. I was cherished as her child; no one whispered to me that the time could ever come when it should be otherwise. She was my delight, my idol. I would

have sacrificed life for her, and thought it happiness. She came to England: there is no need to remind you of what has passed. You well know how, day by day, I have marked the ebbing of the love which was my all. You have yourself aided in the work which has transferred the Countess's affection from me, a friendless orphan, a true daughter of the Church, to a mercenary Protestant heretic. But you cannot know the causes which have brought me to despise her. If she had been worthy of the Countess, I would have buried my grief in my own breast, and they should have been happy in my absence. I would have returned to Italy, and left them to the full enjoyment of their friendship. But I was certain that the Countess was deceived, and that when I was gone she would discover her error, and I strove to open her eyes. She was wilfully blind, and when I placed the facts before her, she would not heed them. At length I saw reason to hope that she was awakening from her vain dream. She parted from Miss Percival with some suspicion of her sincerity. This I knew from her manner. We were about to leave Henningsley, and accident threw in my way a letter which I knew must contain a tissue of apologies and deceptions. Father, I have no wish to exculpate myself. I erred; in your eyes it may be grievously. An intense desire seized me to know the contents of the letter; when it was given into my hands, I opened it."

Father Andrea turned from her, and ejaculated in a low voice, "Base!"

Lucia caught the words. "No, father, never. I am not base. At the moment when I committed the act I was humbled to the dust at my weakness; but I was desperate. They only who have felt my provocation can judge of my sin."

"And the letter — what became of it?"

Lucia smiled scornfully. "It is gone," she exclaimed. "Scattered to the winds." She paused; but there was no interruption, and she proceeded — "Was it likely that I should confess my fault? I did Miss Percival no harm. She said that they must separate, and they did. I saved the Countess from the temptation of again throwing herself into her snares. The letter was like Miss Percival's every action, plausible and hypocritical. If the Countess had seen it, she would have delayed her journey; they would have met; and her first partiality would have returned."

"And the soul of a heretic might have been saved;" and Father Andrea groaned aloud.

"You are sanguine, father," said Lucia, who in her eager self-justification had overlooked the point which would naturally take

the greatest hold of the confessor's mind. "If you had heard and seen what I have, you might be less hopeful of Miss Percival."

Father Andrea laid a powerful hand upon her shoulder. "Miss Percival's name does not again pass your lips. Speak of yourself, your own miserable guilty self. Tell me if you have confessed all, and then leave me, that I may pray that God would vouchsafe to give you another heart."

He motioned her from his presence; but Lucia once more knelt before him, —

"Father, I have confessed all. I have kept nothing back. I am willing to do penance, and I seek for absolution."

The confessor looked at her for an instant in anger, but it melted into sorrow, —

"Unhappy girl!" he said, "is this the hope upon which you have built? Remember that the confession which is extorted by necessity can never be the confession of repentance. You will keep your chamber until your further movements are decided upon."

Lucia heard his words, and remained riveted to the spot. To be refused absolution! it seemed too horrible. But Father Andrea repeated his command, and she rose mechanically, and obeyed him.

Father Andrea remained buried in thought. His conscience was troubled. Lucia had been jealous, wilful, carried away by the strength of temptation; she was guilty: but was he himself innocent? Was the accusation of having placed a snare in her path, by assisting to transfer the Countess's affection to another, utterly false? Father Andrea could not say that it was. In his anxiety to win a convert to his Church, he had been too unmindful of the responsibility he had already incurred. Lucia had been exasperated, when she might have been soothed; and, though her offence could not thus be excused, the confessor's sincerity of conscience made him feel as if he himself must, in a measure, share it. But if the past were irremediable, the future he resolved should never rise up in judgment against him for neglect. The Countess and Lucia must instantly part: there was clearly no alternative: yet Lucia must not be cast off. Until she was restored to her own country, and placed under the care of those who were competent to guide her, the confessor saw that he must still be answerable for her. But in this case, what was to be done? The short interview with the Countess had opened his eyes to the true state of her health. He saw that she was very ill, — far worse than he had anticipated. Immediate change had been recommended for her; and change he was resolved she should have. Under these circumstances, Margaret must be given up. The

pang which accompanied the thought was not slight. The lofty-minded, reserved Romish priest, absorbed in his spiritual duties, and living only for his Church, had yet been attracted by Margaret's simplicity, delicacy, and enthusiasm, in no ordinary degree. He could not regard her in the same light as he did the Countess; but his interest in her was inferior to nothing else. Her conversion was the hope which had for months been nearest to his heart, and to sacrifice it was, in his eyes, to sacrifice her everlasting happiness. The truth had been set before her, and she had owned herself all but convinced. Ignorance, therefore, could not now be her excuse. For more than an hour Father Andrea pondered upon these conflicting claims of duty,—forming schemes for harmonising them, striving to determine which should be relinquished, and occasionally tracing back the chain of events that had conducted him to the present moment, and seeking to discover where and how he had erred, either ignorantly or sinfully.

Upon one point he could in no way satisfy himself. He had often neglected to press the subject of religion upon Margaret, because it appeared more prudent; but there might have been lukewarmness in the delay; and from henceforth, in punishment of his error, the opportunity which he so fervently desired would probably be denied him. He might write to her; but he could not expect such rare communications to have the influence of personal intercourse, even though Margaret were willing to keep them up. If she could be with the Countess in Italy, the fascination of its historical associations and the pomp of its southern worship, aided by the charms of a delicious climate and lovely scenery, would seem to render the result secure. Difficulties, apparently insurmountable, lay in the way;—the uncomfortable position of Margaret's family, the state of the Countess's health, the certain interposition of Mr. Sutherland;—yet Father Andrea's determination made him see possibilities where others would have ridiculed the passing idea. "In the work of the salvation of an immortal soul,"—such was his thought—"no difficulties should be permitted to be insurmountable."

Whilst still brooding upon the subject he was summoned to the Countess.

Beatrice was lying in the same position as when he had left her. Her eyes were closed, her long thin fingers clasped together, and the dark braided hair which shaded her colourless cheek, marking with an unnatural contrast the outline of her fair pure features. Father Andrea, on his entrance, gazed at her in awe. But for the scarcely perceptible breathing, he could have believed that

the charge which had been entrusted to him was at an end,—that the spirit, over which he had so anxiously watched, had found its home of rest. But the Countess moved, opened her eyes, and smiled. The bright glance lit up her face, as the sunlight sparkles on the treacherous wave, and the death which lay waiting beneath was, for an instant, hidden from view.

"I am better, father, much better," she said; "I have slept,—and sleep is so great a blessing."

"The greatest of earthly blessings in sickness and sorrow of heart, my daughter. God make us thankful for it!"

"And for all other mercies!" added the Countess. "Mine have been very great." Then, exerting herself to speak more lightly, she continued,—"I can hear now all that you can tell me. I would know everything concerning Margaret."

The confessor hesitated, and the Countess repeated her request with great urgency.

"You know me well, father. It is only a first shock which does me harm. Afterwards I can bear everything, even self-reproach for injustice."

"My daughter, I could scarcely say that you were unjust. If appearances are ever safe guides, you can find many extenuations."

"Some," answered the Countess; "but the letter—surely you spoke of one? My head grew dizzy; yet I could not have been mistaken."

The confessor was perplexed by this direct question, for he had hoped to introduce the mention of Lucia's guilt by degrees.

"You are right," he replied; "I did speak of a letter. Miss Percival herself named it to me. It contained the result of a conversation with her uncle, in which he had persuaded her to relinquish your friendship lest it should be the means of leading her from the Protestant faith. Nay,"—he added, seeing that the Countess's face expressed anger as well as sorrow—"we must not allow ourselves to be uncharitable in this matter. There are members of the Establishment who are, apparently, as rooted in their belief as we are in ours. Mr. Sutherland may be one of this class, and in following him, Miss Percival is submitting to an authority which she naturally estimates highly."

"But at once! so easily to give up all!" exclaimed the Countess. "Lucia must have been right. She could never have been in earnest."

The confessor's face grew dark at the mention of Lucia.

"Daughter, you must trust me," he said, "I have reason to judge truly in this case. Miss Percival may have yielded too

soon to her uncle's advice; that we cannot decide until we know all that passed between them; but of her perfect sincerity I have no more doubt than I have of your own devotedness to the cause of the Church."

"Heaven grant that you may be right, father! If I am suspicious, it is from my love for her. I would not have a shade to taint the perfection of her character."

"It has not been, and it can not be touched, except by slander," said Father Andrea, emphatically.

The Countess was surprised at his tone, and looked up to inquire his meaning.

"Base, vile slander!" he added, in an under voice.

"You refer to Lucia," said the Countess. "But I have dreaded to be unfair to her in distrusting her."

"You will not be that," said the confessor. "The letter, which I mentioned, was given into her hands."

He could not bring himself to explain Lucia's conduct more clearly, and the Countess did not comprehend what he wished to infer.

"Into Lucia's hand! but how? when? what can you mean? Was it lost by her? Oh, why did she not confess?" The Countess raised herself, and her eye grew excited and impatient.

"Lucia has erred in this, my daughter. She has done you wrong from the beginning. Jealousy is the parent of many crimes."

"Jealousy! yes, I know it; but her words, father, she could not have been deceived, and the letter—in pity tell me—"

The agitation of the Countess's manner became so great, that Father Andrea saw he must not delay his answer.

"The letter was destroyed," he said, watching anxiously the effect of the disclosure. "It told a tale of misery which would have aroused your utmost sympathy. Lucia received, opened, read, and destroyed it."

The eyes of the unhappy Countess wandered wildly around the room. "Lucia! Lucia!" she repeated.

She put her hand to her head; all things seemed bewildering. Lucia's guilt banished the recollection of Margaret's suffering. Father Andrea allowed the silence to last for some moments. He gave her some water, bathed her forehead with refreshing scent, and strove to prevent her from recurring immediately to the subject; but the Countess could not be satisfied until she knew more. Her generous, noble nature, could not at once realise the fact of Lucia's deception. Whilst the confessor gave the particulars of

his interview with Margaret, the Countess's face assumed a more tranquil air. She was enjoying a relief from most painful doubts; but when he recounted the details of Lucia's confession, her pride, and stubbornness of spirit, she again became distressed. Father Andrea marked the quick pulsation in her neck, the rapid, irregular breathing; yet Beatrice sat upright, and when he had ended, she said in a firm, clear voice:—

"Father, I would speak with Lucia now."

"Now, my daughter! You overtask your strength."

"Now, it must be. I will care for her, provide for her; but after this day I can never see her again."

The confessor thought for a few moments. "Yes, it is best," he said; "henceforth she must be my care alone."

"And she may come to me," inquired the Countess, anxiously, "at once?" And in a low soft voice, she added, "Father, my time cannot be long. Let me forgive and pray, and die in peace?"

Father Andrea was afraid of the consequence of expostulation, and the message was sent to Lucia. The Countess sat immovable, her eyes fixed upon the door; whilst the confessor walked up and down the room watching the sad, yet firm expression of her countenance, and sometimes upon the point of insisting that the interview should be deferred. The five minutes which passed seemed to him doubled; but the Countess expressed no impatience; and when the confessor went himself to hasten Lucia, she scarcely noticed that he was gone. After a short delay he returned. Lucia slowly followed him—pride of heart struggling with the shame which bowed her to the earth. The Countess repeated her name kindly, and unfalteringly; and Lucia stood still, for the voice so dearly beloved awoke the softer feelings of her heart. Again the Countess repeated—

"Lucia! my child!"

And then Lucia advanced, threw herself before her, and hiding her face in her lip, sobbed aloud. Beatrice bent over her, and strove to speak; but her words were scarcely audible:—

"Lucia," she said, "may God forgive, and bless you, and guard you when you are far away!"

Lucia looked up in her face, and throwing back her dark ringlets, exclaimed: "Hate me, and despise me, for love is worse than death."

"I will pray for you," said Beatrice, faintly. "I will pray that God may show you your sin; that He may give you repentance. Will you not pray also for yourself?"

Lucia rose suddenly. "Pray for myself!" and she cast a fearful glance at the confessor. "I! the castaway!"

"But to be restored by penitence, daughter," said Father Andrea, solemnly.

"Lucia, you will seek for mercy?" continued the Countess. "You will strive to gain the knowledge of your guilt? When we are parted—and parted we must now be, even in Italy—that alone will comfort me when I think of you."

In those few words Lucia read the extent of her punishment. "Parted we must now be, even in Italy!" The sentence admitted of no hope.

"The Countess is right, daughter," said Father Andrea. "After what has transpired you can never expect to meet her except as a stranger."

A smothered scream fell upon the Countess's ear. Lucia sank into a chair.

"If, now," continued the confessor, "you can in shame and repentance seek for pardon from a fellow mortal, the prayers the Countess may call down mercy upon your guilty head. Refuse to humble yourself, and your heart will become hardened, may be for ever, in its guilt."

The haughty blush of indignation mantled upon Lucia's dark brow. She turned to depart; but Beatrice, in a tone of pitying anguish, murmured,—

"Lucia!"

And the proud Italian spirit was touched. For an instant she stood irresolute, and then the overflowing tide of disappointed affection and self-reproach burst forth. "Forgive me!" she exclaimed: "I will ask for forgiveness; for though I was rejected it was sin to bring suffering upon you, who were born for love and happiness. Yet as I did then, so would I do now. If possible, I would save you from deception—"

Father Andrea held up his finger. "Daughter, there must be no allusion—"

"Yes," interrupted Lucia, "for the last time there must and shall be. The Countess Novera shall know that the unhappy girl whom she taught to live but for her, and then cast aside as unworthy of a thought, had no falsehood in her heart when she said that Margaret Percival was untrue. The accusation was made deliberately, and it is repeated."

"Oh, Lucia!" said the Countess, "and is this repentance?"

Lucia's manner became more gentle. "Repentance for my sin against you, Signora; for from you I hope for pardon."

Beatrice turned away her head in sorrow.

"Daughter," said Father Andrea, "in this there is no repentance. Retire to your own chamber."

Lucia knelt before the Countess, and crossed her hands upon her breast: "Signora, pardon me."

The tone was unnaturally quiet. Beatrice imprinted a fervent kiss upon her forehead, as she whispered:—"God have you in His holy keeping for ever!"

Lucia fastened upon her a long earnest gaze, and rising slowly, walked to the door. She had scarcely reached it when strength seemed to fail her. She staggered, and would have fallen; but Father Andrea drew near to support her, and led her from the room.

It was long before the confessor returned. The Countess had then retired to her own chamber; and when they met again, he feared to tell her the intensity of Lucia's distress. His great anxiety now was to arrange for Lucia's departure, so that she might not meet the Countess again. Every plan seemed beset with difficulties; but when they were suggested to the Countess, he found her, to his surprise, already decided as to what must be done.

"The hour which she had passed alone had not," she said, "been idly spent. The way seemed clear before her. Father Andrea must take Lucia into Devonshire, and she herself would go immediately to Henningsley."

"Immediately!"—the confessor could not conceal his surprise:—"but you are wholly miscalculating; you are not equal to the journey."

"Father, I am equal to anything now. I must see Margaret."

"But I cannot suffer you to travel without me, my daughter. It would be too great a risk."

"Nay," said the Countess, faintly smiling; "even you could not prevent me from feeling the effects of a journey; and, moreover, I must be accustomed to it. Are you prepared, father, to proceed to Italy without me?"

The confessor looked alarmed; excitement, it seemed, was impairing the Countess's judgment. "And with Lucia," continued Beatrice. "She must not be left, and we cannot be together."

"But to leave you! to suffer you to remain in England in your present state! My daughter, you are not aware what you are proposing."

"It appears strange, doubtless," said the Countess; "but my

mind is made up. All things will come alike to me now, for my time on earth is short. All things except one."

Her eye grew brighter as she spoke, and Father Andrea listened eagerly for the next words.

"Father," continued the Countess, "I also have sinned, and my sin has brought its punishment. If Margaret should remain unconverted to the truth, the guilt will lie at my door. I cast her off. To-morrow, if God vouchsafe me strength, I will make another, a last effort. If the love and the prayers of the dying can have any power, Margaret shall follow me to Italy."

She paused, breathless from eagerness. Father Andrea did not seek to answer her. "Dying" was the only word which rested upon his mind.

"Is there not hope?" pursued the Countess, in a tone sepulchral from its depth.

"Die! die!" repeated the confessor. His eye was fixed, gazing upon vacancy. Beatrice stretched out her wasted hand. He started from its touch; but the next instant it was pressed convulsively, and one scalding tear of agony fell upon it. The weakness was but for a moment, and the voice of severe composure with which he again spoke gave the Countess but little reason to suppose that the plan which she had brought forward was one which he himself most fervently desired. "Have you well considered this matter? Is it the safest course?"

"It is the only one, father, which now presents itself. In England I must not stay; but for Margaret, I would not wish to stay. The voice that summons me to the land of my adoption is a voice from my husband's grave. Where he sleeps in death there would I sleep also."

"You overrate your influence, my daughter," said the confessor.

"If I do—but no, father, I do not. You tell me Margaret unchanged; then she will follow me to the end."

"It might be so, if she were left to her own will; but Miss Percival has strict principles of duty,—the demands of her family will be first considered."

"Even there, father, I have foreseen all," said the Countess. "I have a lure for Margaret's duty as well as for her affection. Let her come with me, and it shall be under any conditions that she may please."

"I do not fully comprehend," replied Father Andrea, now betraying by his accent the eager interest with which he listened to the idea.

"Is it true?" said the Countess, after an instant's hesitation; "is it really true that Margaret has decided upon leaving her family, and working for her brother?"

"Yes, so she assured me. But in what way can this affect you?"

"Lady Anstruther goes with me to Italy," answered the Countess, "or rather she will precede me. In the winter we are to share the Palazzo Novera, and I have engaged to bring with me a governess for her child, who will remain with me whilst Lady Anstruther travels."

"I see, I see," interrupted the confessor quickly; "but," he added, with an air of thought, "the position will be difficult and humiliating."

The Countess looked up proudly. "Difficult and humiliating for my friend! — no, that can never be. And I know Lady Anstruther well: she is gentle and noble-minded, and Margaret will be happy with her. You also will be near to watch," she added. "Margaret will be safe with you whatever may be my fate."

The allusion to herself again shook the confessor's self-command, and it was in a changed voice that he replied, — "One greater than man will be her protection, if she will obey His voice."

"Yes, to Him we must commit her. But I would prepare for everything. It is vain to speak of life when death is standing at our door."

"And Lady Anstruther would approve?" inquired the confessor, not trusting himself to reply to the observation.

"She will nowhere meet with Margaret's equal," replied the Countess. "Why should you be doubtful?"

"I am not doubtful, my daughter. Rather, I would look upon the suggestion as one sent in mercy to all. Few hopes have been so dear to me as that of recovering Miss Percival from the path of error."

"Mercy to all! — to me above all!" said the Countess, reverently. "Am I not selfish, father, in blending my own happiness with Margaret's eternal interests?"

"Selfish! When we are summoned before the tribunal of Heaven, may my heart acquit me like yours!"

The unwonted expression of enthusiasm was followed by a more rigid air of self-restraint. A slight blush tinged the Countess's cheek as she replied, "My heart cannot acquit me as you think. I know not what is before me, except that it must be suffering.

With Margaret all could be borne: without her,—father, I shrink from dying, not from death."

The confessor passed his hand before his eyes, to conceal the traces of human weakness, as he answered: "Will there not be heavenly aid, my daughter? Can a sinner wish for more?"

"Aid for the soul,—more, infinitely more than could be thought of or deserved; but for the body I have been faithless, and feared the loneliness of being watched and tended by servants."

"That would never be permitted," replied the confessor; "Lady Anstruther loves you too well."

"No, father, no," exclaimed the Countess; "she does not love me. Love is a word too holy, too deep, for the chance regard of this world; and before another winter shall arrive, I may be far beyond the reach of human care."

Father Andrea became suddenly thoughtful and silent. He appeared unconscious of the earnest look which the Countess bent upon him, dreading from his silence that some grave objection was working in his mind. But his abstraction arose from a very different source. He was pondering upon the light that had seemingly been cast over his path; the way that had been opened through his difficulties; and even the heavy blight of grief which lay at his heart, as the knowledge of the Countess's danger grew clearer and clearer, could not check the exulting hope with which he looked forward to the realisation of his long-cherished wishes. Still his habitual reserve mastered the keenness of his feelings, and turning to Beatrice, he said composedly,—"All this may be. We are blind, and must not trust to our own judgment of what is best; but one thing I can never consent to: I cannot leave you."

"It will be for the journey only," replied the Countess, "and if Margaret is with me I shall be better. There will be happiness for me then as long as it shall please Heaven to spare my life."

Father Andrea was still undecided, and Beatrice became more urgent. A sanguine disposition made her believe all things to be practicable upon which her heart was bent, and the first step now requisite, the meeting with Margaret at Henningsley, was thought to be an easy undertaking. Before night came, however, Beatrice was convinced that it must be postponed. She was even induced to consider the chances of failure in the plan, and to consent that, if eventually Margaret could not be prevailed upon to accompany her, Father Andrea should give Lucia into Lady Anstruther's care, with strict directions to watch her carefully, and never to lose sight of her until she was consigned to her friends, and that he himself should follow his original intention and ac-

company her. With this agreement they separated. Early the following morning, Father Andrea was on his way to Devonshire with Lucia. The Countess still persisted in her hope of being able to leave London immediately; but nearly a fortnight elapsed before she was permitted to move; and Father Andrea, having by that time brought Lucia into a state of mind more consonant to his wishes, found himself at liberty to leave her, and to devote the remaining portion of his stay in England to the Countess and Henningsley.

CHAPTER LXXI.

"Good news for you, Margaret, my dear," said Miss Debrett, entering the school-room unexpectedly, some days after Margaret's interview with Father Andrea. "Mrs. St. Aubyn—but I forgot the children: pretty darlings! cannot they run in the garden a little while?"

"Not very well," said Margaret, "in the midst of lessons."

"But just to-day; I really do want to speak to you particularly, and it is of consequence too. The Colonel——"

"Well! yes, certainly, if you will," exclaimed Margaret in haste, knowing that if the secret communication were not made in private it certainly would be in public. "Run away, my dears, till I send for you."

The children were gone in a very few moments, books being thrown down in a hurry, copy-books blotted, and Grace's new silver thimble sent on a journey to the further end of the room. Margaret would have been vexed, if the mention of Colonel Clive's name had not absorbed her attention. Miss Debrett looked around to see that no listeners were left, and then carefully closing the door, said in a mysterious manner, "Colonel Clive, my dear, I suspect, grows worse and worse."

"Worse?" said Margaret; "but I did not know he was very ill."

"Not so much ill as fractious. Mrs. St. Aubyn says he is fidgety, and nothing pleases him."

"I see no good news in that," observed Margaret.

"Possibly not just now, my dear; but it may come to good by-and-by. Mrs. St. Aubyn says she cannot tell what to do to amuse him, and she wants to have Agatha back."

"It is very kind of her," observed Margaret, unable to reprss the momentary inclination for sarcasm; then checking herself,

she added, "Mrs. St. Aubyn can scarcely think that Agatha will be happier under such circumstances than she was before."

"Possibly not, my dear; only Mrs. St. Aubyn thinks that her being away makes him more uncomfortable."

"How can that be?" inquired Margaret. "He did not appear to regret her absence."

"More, perhaps, than we think, Margaret; and besides, it is an awkward situation for a man. He is married, and he is not married, you see. He is not free in the same way he was before, and yet he is lonely: and people look strange at him, and talk."

"And no wonder," said Margaret; but she thought more of Agatha than of Colonel Clive.

"Then Margaret," continued Miss Debrett, in a disappointed tone,—"you don't think there is any more hope?"

"I did not say that," replied Margaret. "I should be very sorry to think so; but I do not imagine that Colonel Clive's being fractious, as you call it, will be any temptation to Agatha to return."

"Why, when I say that he is fractious," replied Miss Debrett, "I dare say there is a fault with Mrs. St. Aubyn also. I have not seen her for some time before yesterday, and then she seemed put out. She said that she had received a letter from the Countess's friend, the Italian girl, and that she was going to Italy directly; and that appeared to worry her, for I really think she liked her."

"What, directly!—Lucia Fontana?—and the Countess too?"

"The Countess too, of course," replied Miss Debrett.

Those careless words, "of course:"—they were a dagger to Margaret's heart.

"Are you quite sure?" she said.

"No, my dear, not sure, because I did not pay particular attention; but I know they are not coming back to Henningsley."

This was all the confirmation that could be required of that which Margaret feared. If Father Andrea had succeeded in satisfying the Countess that her affection had undergone no change, he would doubtless have persuaded Beatrice to return speedily; at least if they were unavoidably detained, she would have written. But nearly a week had elapsed, and nothing had been heard either of the Countess or the confessor. It was clear therefore, that the letter had been received, and that the impression upon the Countess's mind was uneffaceable.

"You seem dull, my dear," said Miss Debrett, observing the alteration in Margaret's manner. You are sorry, I dare say

about Henningsley; but things always come best as they are ordered; and it would have been much worse if you had not been going away yourselves."

Margaret fully agreed to the Mercy that plans all things; and from reasons of which Miss Debrett was not aware. If, as within the last few days she had found reason to hope, her mother could be persuaded to consent to her wishes in favour of George, it would be much better that nothing should remain to tempt her to look back upon past happiness. A stern, self-sacrificing, devoted spirit, bent only upon duty, could alone, with the blessing of God, support her through the ordeal.

"I was going to say something besides, about myself," continued Miss Debrett. "You know time is getting on, and my year expires very soon, and Anne Duncan came over yesterday, and I was talking to your mother the day before, and really, if you must go — Alton is so far off — I don't think I should see you more than once in six months."

"And you are really inclined to accept Mrs. Duncan's proposal?" said Margaret. "I am sure it would be best."

"Are you? I am glad of that; but I don't like it, my dear; I don't like it at all. And I thought about Alton. I asked Mr. Sutherland one day whether there were any lodgings in the place, and he told me there was not one, except a bed-room at the shop, and that you know would not do."

"No," said Margaret smiling. "You would be convinced of that if you were to see the shop."

"Ah! I forgot — you went over yesterday."

"George came for me," replied Margaret. "My uncle wished me to see the house which we are to have."

"How strange! I knew there was something that I wanted to ask about; but the Colonel's being cross put it out of my head. It was that — I do want to hear what you think about the place."

"I knew pretty well what it was like before," said Margaret: "it is a cottage; low, very low, compared with modern houses; that I think is the greatest objection. The rooms are of a tolerable size; the drawing-room seventeen feet by fifteen; and the bed-rooms are good; but we shall be rather crowded. Then there is a small garden, a good deal out of order, but it is on a hill, so it commands a pretty view. We shall have a kitchen garden also, and be very near the Church, and almost close to the parsonage."

"And what does your poor mother say to it?" inquired Miss Debrett, not particularly liking Margaret's moderate description.

"Mamma is very indifferent as yet," replied Margaret. "All places are alike to her since she must leave her home, except that she will find it a comfort to be near my uncle."

"Yes, and that will be delightful for you especially, my dear."

Margaret's heart was quite full. She could not find words to reply. That would have been her great comfort, but it must be given up, she must learn to live alone amongst strangers.

"What changes!" sighed Miss Debrett. "They make me think more about Agatha. She would be much better off at Ashington."

"Much, if she could learn to think so."

"And if anything could be done to bring about a meeting between her and the Colonel," pursued Miss Debrett. "If he were to see her sweet pretty face again, I don't think he would like to part from it."

"Faces are pretty or not according to association," observed Margaret; but the remark was beyond Miss Debrett, though she felt its truth daily. Margaret's countenance, bright with intelligence, and softened by feeling and principle, was far more pleasing to her eye than Agatha's regular beauty. Margaret saw that she had gained all the information which was to be obtained, and now hoped that Miss Debrett would go, and allow the children to resume their lessons; but she was not yet to be released. In her interest for others, Miss Debrett had wandered off from the subject which concerned herself, and now, returning to it, gave Margaret the details of her arrangements; which, although she would not at first acknowledge it, were all decided on. About the same time that the Grove was to be left, Miss Debrett's lease of her house would expire, and she had then settled upon removing to Eastlake. "She should, in fact," she said, "be scarcely more distant from her dear friends there than she would have been if she had remained at Staunton. From Alton to Staunton it was said to be sixteen miles. From Alton to Eastlake it might be sixteen and a half, or seventeen; but in going out for the day the one mile did not much signify. At any rate she should be better off than staying behind when every one was away."

Margaret was surprised at the placidity with which this announcement was made; but the first shock being over, Miss Debrett found pleasure, rather than not, in the prospect of removal. It roused her; made her live, instead of vegetating from day to day; and the bustle was beneficial both to mind and body. She was even then full of business, though so little aware

of the value of time, that half an hour had passed before Margaret was finally released; and it was at last only with the promise "that she would step over in the course of the afternoon, and give her opinion as to the best way of packing some old china. It was not to be sent off yet, but it was as well to be beforehand." Then followed a sigh,—a burst of lamentation, and all but tears. Miss Debrett's pleasures and sorrows followed each other as rapidly as the sunshine and clouds of an April day.

CHAPTER LXXII.

MARGARET would have given much to have been as ready as Miss Debrett in the art of turning her mind from one subject to another. But change at one-and-twenty is very different from change at five-and-fifty, especially when it involves the breaking up of every early association, and the entering upon an untried anxious life. Miss Debrett had reached the season when, as in childhood, the day bears its own burden, and the morrow is left to the providence of God. It is a season dependent, not upon age, but upon the events of life. To a religious mind there can scarcely come more than one very great shock, whether caused by death, or loss of fortune, or the bitterness of a disappointed hope, which eats like a canker into the happiness of after years. A certain portion of our lives is passed as in a dream. The world is then real; time appears eternity; and the joys of earth are prizes worthy of hope and fear. Even by those who are striving to fix their hearts upon higher things, this delusion is still in its measure cherished. We say that our home cannot remain unaltered; we talk of the "changes and chances of this mortal life;" yet we are using words of which we do not understand the meaning. The hour comes at last, fraught with the first great grief. For the moment we are stunned. In the anguish of our hearts we think that we shall never know happiness again. But the storm passes over, and the sunlight once more gladdens our dwellings. It shines as brightly as ever in the eye of the world. Peace, and health, and cheerfulness, surround us; perhaps, even increase of prosperity follows us in our new mode of existence. Men look upon us with envy, and say that we are again as we were in times past. In the secrecy of our own hearts (if trial has

done the work for which it was ordained of God), we know that it is far otherwise. The veil has fallen from our eyes, and that which before we said, we now know to be true. Life, except so far as it is a preparation for heaven, has become one vast unreality.

Margaret had often read that she was a stranger and a pilgrim upon earth; but it was difficult to realise the fact whilst all things around her were pursuing their ordinary course. Her affections were bound to this world more firmly than she could ever have imagined, except by the shock of their uprooting. Yet even in this early stage of trial, whilst yet suffering from its immediate effects, Margaret experienced something of the blessing which accompanies it. The thought of further change was now comparatively indifferent. Pride, independence, dread of the world's observation, the pang of separation from those she loved, powerful feelings in all cases, and peculiarly so in hers, were now greatly subdued. Margaret was crushed, and to be crushed by the hand of God is, if we will, to be raised in the kingdom of heaven. This comparative quietness of mind was partially shared by Mrs. Percival. She had undergone even a greater change than Margaret. The tie which was severed was of a closer kind, and the home which was broken up, had been endeared to her for a longer period. She had not Margaret's strength of principles to support her; and her indifference frequently savoured more of apathy than of resignation; but from whatever cause, she had become calmer in manner, and for the time less worldly. She could hear many things discussed now, which twelve months before would have aroused a burst of indignation; and even when Margaret hinted at the plan by which George might be maintained at college, and after gradually enlarging upon it at last pressed her mother to consent, Mrs. Percival bore with the unwelcome suggestion in a manner which Margaret had never ventured to calculate upon.

She did not indeed agree to it; she even said that nothing would induce her to do so; that Margaret would lower herself; that it was a sacrifice perfectly uncalled for; that George would not allow it; that she could not do without her; that the children's education would be quite neglected; that her own health was failing, and that she was bowed down by affliction; but in all this there was nothing of the imperious refusal which Margaret had expected; the "No, my dear, it is impossible." A multitude of objections presented at once are, in general, less to be feared than one which is very decided. As regarded herself, Margaret

deemed that for such an object, pride ought not for a moment to stand in the way. She did not profess to be without it; but she felt that it was not only wrong, but humiliating, to indulge it. It was placing herself in a false position, under the world, when she ought to be superior to it. George's consent could not be withheld, as it involved Philip's prospects also. The children were certainly to be considered; but Mrs. Percival was competent actually to instruct them, and Margaret knew that she need not fear for them in any way whilst subject to Mr. Sutherland's watchfulness. After a very few years she should be at liberty to return home and take the charge again herself. Mrs. Percival's health was not a subject of much anxiety. She was not looking well; but this could not be expected; and her complaints were more of nervousness and low spirits, than of actual suffering. The idea of leaving her alone was that which weighed most with Margaret; but to Mrs. Percival occupation was everything. With the children to instruct, she was in fact more likely to be happy, than if Margaret were performing the duty for her. The great change from a large house, a carriage, servants, and money, to a small cottage in a country village, had often given Margaret cause to fear that her mother's spirits would entirely give way, and that she would, in despair, yield all to her management, and sink into apathy. The necessity for exertion would remove this danger, and Margaret had no doubt in her own mind that her mother would in the end be the happier for it. This, of course, she could not suggest. The only ground upon which she could rest her wishes was the advantage it would be to all the family to have both George and Philip provided for, and the imprudence of allowing any personal objections to stand in the way of such an arrangement.

At one time Margaret had thought that Agatha would be Mrs. Percival's companion; but a new idea was now entertained; or rather, a slumbering hope was re-awakened. There did really seem some little prospect of a reconciliation with Colonel Clive, and every other consideration was clearly inferior to this. How it was to be accomplished was a difficult problem to solve; but Margaret knew that Agatha had listened, with patience at least, to Mr. Sutherland's advice, and, even if unwilling to make any advances herself, was not likely to reject them when made by others. The cause of this comparative meekness was not, however, that Agatha was convinced of having acted wrongly. She still persisted in saying that her conduct was justified by circumstances; but time had somewhat softened the bitterness of her grief for the loss of

her child, whilst it had brought a change, which made a residence in her own family very undesirable.

Agatha did not at all enjoy the prospect of a retired life at Alton. The luxury of Ashington was much more suited to her views of happiness, and she began to think seriously, that it might be possible to bear with Colonel Clive's temper better than with personal privations. Margaret was aware of the state of her sister's mind, and that her motives were low; but it was vain to expect that, as yet, Agatha would be governed by any higher. She was improved, certainly,—more forbearing and less selfish; and her feelings had been brought out by the late events: there was a germ of goodness which might, perhaps, in time produce fruit: but it would not do to wait for this, if it were practicable before to replace Agatha in her right position. It was with this view that Margaret, after Miss Debrett's visit, began to consider the steps which might be necessary in order to bring about the desired result. An interview with Mrs. St. Aubyn seemed to be the first point; but this was not easily to be obtained. Mrs. St. Aubyn had taken no notice of the family since the separation, and Mrs. Percival, whose pride was much incensed at her conduct, protested, when Margaret repeated Miss Debrett's observation, that nothing should induce her to be again on any terms of intimacy with her.

Events, however, were more favourable to Margaret's wishes than she had expected. She went in the afternoon to assist Miss Debrett in packing her china. There was no expectation of seeing Mrs. St. Aubyn, for she called on Miss Debrett only the preceding day. Margaret watched her carriage go down the road, and remembered the time when it had been Agatha's great pleasure and ambition to be seated in it; and Miss Debrett, as she looked out, remarked that—

"She could not think who would be Mrs. St. Aubyn's next favourite; now the Italian girl was gone she seemed to be quite alone."

Then came some expressions of wonder as to what visits she could be intending to pay in that direction; but Miss Debrett's remarks were arrested by the surprising fact that the carriage had only driven to the cross road, and had then turned.

"It was coming back."

Margaret withdrew from the window; but Miss Debrett remained where she was.

"I do not think it is going to stop. Yes, actually. Margaret, my dear, what can be the reason? She was here only yesterday.

and she calls so seldom. Just put that china jar back, and smoothe the cloth, will you? Dear me! how untidy a room gets when one is packing!"

The room was not in the most perfect order, certainly; but Mrs. St. Aubyn did not give herself the trouble of criticising Miss Debrett's household arrangements, or mode of life. She visited her because she was well connected, and had been her acquaintance from childhood; but except as intimate with the Percivals, she often forgot almost the fact of her existence. Margaret wished herself away sincerely, though conscious that the visit might be of service to her views. She had no unkind disposition towards Mrs. St. Aubyn; but the meeting must necessarily be an awkward one. Mrs. St. Aubyn, however, covered any surprise or confusion with infinite tact; shook hands, inquired for Mrs. Percival, and then informed Miss Debrett that she had left a small parcel in the entrance passage on the preceding day, which had been forgotten, and she had called to ask for it. Miss Debrett knew nothing of the parcel, and was quite "distressed that it should not be forthcoming; her servant might have seen it, and she would inquire." The bell was rung; but Anne delayed making her appearance, and Miss Debrett grew nervous, and against Mrs. St. Aubyn's entreaties, went to look for her. There was something beyond nervousness in this, for Miss Debrett, with all her simplicity, was aware that it might be of use to leave Margaret and Mrs. St. Aubyn together. Margaret became very timid and shy, when she found herself just in the situation which she had before desired. Her ideas were wandering, and her words seemed to be lost; and she could think of nothing to say, except that the weather was fine. Mrs. St. Aubyn was more *nonchalante*. She had reason to guess Margaret's opinions from observations which had been repeated by Miss Debrett; and as she was at that very moment looking forward to the infliction of a long evening with her brother, she was the more resolved that the present opportunity should not pass without some overtures for reconciliation. When two persons are alone together, each thinking of the same thing, and bent upon the same object, it is seldom that some mode is not found of introducing the wished-for topic. Margaret scarcely could remember afterwards how the conversation began; but something was said about the weather, then about flowers, flowers in general, flowers in particular, Ashington flowers, and at length Colonel Clive's name was mentioned, with the remark from Mrs. St. Aubyn that he was looking very much altered. She fixed

her eyes upon Margaret as she spoke, with a very meaning expression, and Margaret coloured, and said she was extremely sorry to hear it.

"Yes, he is altered; very much indeed. Really, sometimes, I scarcely know him; but, poor man! he has suffered so much!"

This might have been the conclusion of the subject, if Margaret desired, for Mrs. St. Aubyn made a dead pause. Margaret rallied all her courage and said boldly: —

"It has been a very unfortunate affair from the beginning."

"Very: no one can feel that more than myself, having planned it all — set my heart upon it. But one never can guess beforehand how people will suit each other. It has given me a lesson for life."

"I hope we shall all profit by it," said Margaret. "No persons can have regretted what has passed more than we have done."

Mrs. St. Aubyn looked a little proud and doubtful. "Every one must be aware," she said, "that it was a very uncomfortable business; but she should scarcely have supposed that Mrs. Clive's family had been much distressed at it, seeing that they received her with open arms, and publicly supported her conduct."

"You do us injustice," replied Margaret, striving to retain a meek and gentle manner; "there was nothing else in our power. Whatever might have been Agatha's faults of temper, she had still a claim upon her parents, which they could not deny."

"They did not wish to do it," said Mrs. St. Aubyn, shortly: then, fearing lest her asperity of manner might widen the breach, "but it is no use to talk of the past."

"None whatever," replied Margaret.

Mrs. St. Aubyn was thrown back by Margaret's quietness. She had anticipated some avowal, which would have given her the advantage, and might at last have enabled her to gain her object by patronage and sympathy, and the offer (as a great favour) of using her best endeavours to put the affair on a better footing. But Margaret knew, that although Agatha had done very wrong, her conduct had not been unprovoked; and she did not choose to appear too anxious to see her again the mistress of Ashington. She remained silent, therefore, being almost certain, from Mrs. St. Aubyn's manner, that the subject would be resumed, unless interrupted by Miss Debrett. But it was interrupted. Miss Debrett had found the parcel, and returned with it, and Mrs. St. Aubyn had no excuse for staying longer. Miss Debrett cast a wistful glance at Margaret.

longing to know what had passed in her absence; but she could perceive only constraint in the manner of either. Mrs. St. Aubyn was forced to take leave; but, as she shook hands with Margaret, she said, in an under tone—

"I should be sorry to think that the circumstances of which we have spoken were to last for ever."

"You cannot be as sorry as I should be," replied Margaret, whilst her manner carried with it the conviction of sincerity. "My sister's happiness must ever be very near my heart."

"And my brother's near mine," said Mrs. St. Aubyn. Margaret looked round for Miss Debrett; but she had again left the room, in order not to be in the way. Mrs. St. Aubyn marvelled at Margaret's composure; it proved that if anything were to be done, the advance must be made by her. "You have influence with your sister," she said, "if you could be prevailed upon to use it."

"I have used it," was the reply. "We are all most deeply sensible of Agatha's error; but her wishes can be of no avail unless she is assured that Colonel Clive is willing to forget the past; and I fear he is still indifferent, if not angry."

"Nay, there you are mistaken," replied Mrs. St. Aubyn, thrown off her guard by her own eagerness. "Since we are alone," and casting her eye round, she assumed a more confidential tone, "I may as well speak openly. You are in error in thinking my poor brother indifferent. Angry he was no doubt at first, he had great reason to be so; Agatha behaved shamefully—you must excuse me for saying it; but he is not indifferent. In fact, I can see that the affair is preying upon his spirits. He is not at all well; Mr. Harrison threatens him with gout. I am sure if it is gout," she added, in a tone of despairing irritation, "I cannot think what I shall do."

"Then we have given Colonel Clive less credit than was his due," replied Margaret. "It doubtless has appeared as if he cared nothing whatever for the absence of his wife, or the loss of his child. A little expression of feeling on his side might have produced more on Agatha's."

"Agatha is decidedly cold," said Mrs. St. Aubyn; "and my brother is not of an age to express much."

"He expressed nothing," replied Margaret; "he does not do so now."

"But I tell you, my dear," — the epithet escaped Mrs. St. Aubyn's lips quite unintentionally,—"I assure you he does feel; if Agatha were to see him she would repent of her conduct."

"Agatha does not require any considerations to make her repent," observed Margaret. "She is aware that she has acted wrongly; but, as I said before, nothing on her side can be of any consequence unless Colonel Clive should choose to come forward."

This was arriving at something like a decided view of the case, and Mrs. St. Aubyn, after musing upon it for a few moments, said: "Am I to understand, then, that Agatha—Mrs. Clive, would not be averse from returning to Ashington, if my brother were willing to receive her?"

"I cannot answer for my sister's wishes," replied Margaret: "they would naturally be influenced by the manner in which any overtures for reconciliation might be made."

This was rather puzzling to Mrs. St. Aubyn. Overtures from Colonel Clive were not likely to be of a much more affectionate nature than "Colonel Clive presents his compliments, and hopes that Mrs. Clive will return." What Margaret meant by overtures she did not quite understand. "Well, my dear," she said, "it is a difficult matter, I see; but I will think upon it. It does not seem right that the case should continue as it is."

"No, indeed," replied Margaret; and she added more cordially than she had yet done, "you may be quite sure that, as far as the members of our family are concerned, no efforts will be spared to put it upon a better footing."

CHAPTER LXXIII.

And so Margaret and Mrs. St. Aubyn parted; and Margaret, after in some degree satisfying Miss Debrett's curiosity, returned home, almost in spirits. The idea of Agatha's being re-established in her proper position made her sensible how much her misconduct had added to the other trials which had been appointed for them. Yet it was with no very sanguine expectation that she more deliberately viewed her sister's prospect of happiness. To be the nurse of a cross, gouty old man, whom she did not love, was no very enviable situation. Margaret would not have been surprised if, after all, Agatha had drawn back. She did not dread the censure of society, or shrink from exciting public observation, as Margaret did. Perhaps, if her home had been what it once was,

she would have continued to brave it; but Agatha had calculated worldly advantages before her marriage, and she calculated them again now; and when Margaret related the meeting with Mrs. St. Aubyn, she listened, thought, heaved a deep sigh, and said: "If it must be, it must; but mine is a hard lot." Margaret could not help at the moment thinking of her own. But there was one great difference between them. Agatha had the prospect of external prosperity, with the consciousness that the trials which accompanied them were of her own seeking: Margaret, the almost certainty of comparative adversity, with the knowledge that her sorrows were sent for good, and that an Almighty arm was near to support her under them.

Mrs. Percival was incredulous when informed of the prospect of reconciliation. She was in that humour in which we are resolved that no good can befall us. Mr. Dampier's refusal to keep George at college had for the time completely destroyed her hopeful spirit. She thought it possible that Mrs. St. Aubyn might be in earnest — but impossible that Colonel Clive should ever be brought round; and Margaret, who had carried her the intelligence, trusting that it would give her pleasure, was blamed for imprudence in having named it to Agatha, and thereby exciting false expectations. Poor Margaret! the variety in her life consisted but in variety of trial, and it was a cause for gratitude that, being obliged to think for her family, she was enabled to forget herself. Beatrice and Father Andrea, religion and Mr. Sutherland, were kept for her midnight meditations. In the day, her thoughts were occupied in the business of the present hour. Perplexity and multiplicity of arrangements crowded upon her; yet she could see them working to one point. In a very short time they were to remove to Alton, and, before that, all affairs connected with the Grove were to be settled. Something also she saw must quickly be decided about George and Philip. Mr. Dampier had written again rather urgently. His wishes seemed directed to Philip rather than to George. He had a fancy for more entirely adopting him, and had even settled upon the public school to which he would send him; but he owned that George, as his godson, had the first claim. It was a great blessing to Margaret to reflect that events could not always remain in their present uncertainty; and as they seemed verging towards the consummation of her own intentions, she forced herself to look at the latter steadily. Mr. Sutherland's doubts as to the state of her mind were very painful to her; she could not say that they were imaginary. With faith, humility, and earnestness, she yet seemed walking in a mist. Romanism

appeared more visionary, but scarcely less attractive. It was only by forcibly turning her thoughts in a different direction, not allowing herself to indulge in reading, or in contemplations connected with it, that she could drive it from her mind. And whilst practising this restraint, she too often seemed fighting against truth. A hand seemed stretched out to guide her, whilst she presumptuously rejected it.

There was but one thought which had power to strengthen her in these seasons of temptation. Unless the English Church were indisputably proved to be no true church, she must risk the guilt of schism in forsaking it; and surely a God of mercy would pardon her if, in the dread of that sin, she were steadfastly to adhere to it, rather than upon her own responsibility to follow guides whose claims it was utterly out of her reach to demonstrate. This was the lowest ground upon which Margaret satisfied herself; at other seasons her convictions became much clearer. She could see then the perfect accordance between the Prayer Book and the Bible; and the wonderful wisdom which in days of stormy controversy had steered safely between the Scylla and Charybdis of Puritanism and superstition. She could descry a divine life at that very time, in the sudden awakening of so many minds to a sense of their awful responsibilities; and she could look forward, not without a hope, that the principles of the Church would eventually be revived everywhere, and the sheep which had wandered from her fold be gradually brought back. Or, if this were not to be,—if the sins of past and present generations had indeed called down the vengeance of Heaven, so that her candlestick were doomed to be removed from its place, Margaret could still perceive that the Church of Rome could not for that reason claim her allegiance. Even if its doctrines were pure, if the Veneration of the Blessed Virgin and the Saints did not approach to idolatry, if the doctrine of Transubstantiation did not obscure the Catholic faith of the real spiritual presence of our Lord in the Eucharist, if indulgences were not held out by which the penalties of sin might be remitted, and souls released from Purgatory—if these and other human inventions were destroyed, still it could not be proved that the Bishop of Rome had a right to be the spiritual ruler of the English people. Reason was, though by slow degrees, becoming more powerful with Margaret than mere feeling, and she had hope that her uncle would in time be satisfied, and trust to the assurances which she had so repeatedly given, that she would teach all who might be entrusted to her care strictly according to the principles of the English Church, and

never allow herself again to tamper with Romish books, either of doctrine, instruction, or devotion. The latter had been the most dangerous, for they had occupied her at unguarded moments; she had imbibed their spirit unconsciously, and from admiring the holy and elevated spirit which breathed through many of them, her mind had become prejudiced in favour of the communion with which they were associated, before she was in the least aware of it. Now she endeavoured to satisfy herself with the sober, but not less spiritual writings of the English divines: the devotions of Bishops Andrewes, Ken, Wilson, and Jeremy Taylor; the services for the different divisions of the day, by Bishop Cosin; the Meditations on the Holy Communion by Christopher Sutton, and others of the same class; and above all, Margaret studied the Bible carefully, and endeavoured to draw out the instructions contained in the practical example it brought before her, so as to direct the conduct of her daily life.

But for the Countess Novera, Margaret might now have begun to taste something of peace, though not in outward circumstances, yet in her own heart. But suspense and uncertainty regarding her rendered all attempts at tranquillity nugatory. She was vexed with herself for not having made more particular inquiries of Mrs. St. Aubyn, although no opportunity had offered for doing so; and if it had, she would probably, at the time, have been unwilling to mention the subject. Even if Beatrice were inexorable, Margaret could not believe that Father Andrea would leave her without some further communication. After the sympathy and regard which he had expressed, he could not quit England without some note or message; and she rested upon this hope, whilst blaming herself for it; and accusing herself of deceiving her uncle, and still cherishing Romish affections, because she could not, by one effort, banish the past entirely from her memory. Everything was now in confusion at the Grove; the children's lessons were very irregular, and often altogether missed; and the house began to assume the wretched, dismantled appearance, which precedes a departure. Margaret bore all heroically when in the presence of others, but there were most bitter moments when she was alone, engaged perhaps in looking over papers, packing books, or merely wandering from room to room, not knowing what was to be done, because there was so much to do. The merest trifle would then recall the happy childish days which were gone for ever; and her thoughts fell of their own accord into melancholy contemplations. Her life seemed broken in two, and all the visions which she had most cherished

were destroyed. Perhaps she had been wrong in indulging them, yet they seemed innocent at the time. At one period she had pleased herself especially with the children. She had taken great delight in marking their improvement, and had begun to carry out one or two favourite theories of instruction. Harriet was growing almost a companion, gentle and humble-minded, and lady-like in mind and manner; and Grace was taming down into a quick, agreeable, and not forward child; even little Juliet was showing a sensible affectionate disposition, under Margaret's training: nothing could be more hopeful. But all must be left. Margaret sometimes strove to console herself by thinking that the separation need only be whilst George remained at college; but her faith in the stability of all earthly prospects was utterly shaken, and she did not like to look forward for years to come. Many things she knew might happen to prevent her return home. Perhaps she was destined to be a governess all her life, and this gentle beginning was ordered in mercy, that she might be gradually prepared. Such thoughts were not unfavourable to her character. They taught her trust and submission, and she learnt more and more to live for the duties of the present hour.

There was enough in this to occupy her, especially when, two days after the interview with Mrs. St. Aubyn, she received a note which opened the prospect of the reconciliation with Colonel Clive more fully. Mrs. St. Aubyn began by stating that "she would have called; but she did not like to intrude upon Mrs. Percival, just at that time;" a half excuse, which Mrs. Percival was not inclined to receive very favourably. Margaret, however, persuaded her to look at it more charitably, in consideration of what followed. "Mrs. St. Aubyn had thought much," she said, "of the conversation that had taken place. It had given her a hope that Mrs. Clive was aware of the extent of the wrong which she had committed, and was willing to repair her past errors." To this view of the subject Mrs. Percival strongly objected; but Margaret did not suffer her to dwell upon it, and led her on to the important parts of the communication which remained to be considered. Mrs. St. Aubyn said, "that on the day she met Margaret, she had visited her brother at Ashington. She had found him extremely unwell and depressed; he complained very much of being lonely, and was quite vexed at the notion of her going away, as she had intended to stay for a month with some friends. He was not equal to moving himself; and, as he was threatened with gout, it seemed likely that he would be solitary for some time. Under these circumstances

Mrs. St. Aubyn had deemed it a desirable opportunity to mention Agatha's name. Colonel Clive had listened more patiently than she had anticipated; and, although strong in his condemnation of his wife's conduct, did not reject the idea of receiving her again. Mrs. St. Aubyn thought that in his heart he was pleased, though it was not to be expected that a person of his age and disposition would show the sensibility of a younger man. He had inquired whether his sister had seen Agatha, and Mrs. St. Aubyn had then detailed her conversation with Margaret. Upon leaving him, she had ventured to ask whether he could consent to see his wife, and his reply was not decidedly in the negative."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Mrs. Percival, when Margaret finished the note; "if this is all that Mrs. St. Aubyn can say, the affair had almost better remain in its present state. Not reject! not reply decidedly in the negative! It is a very strange way of making advances, as you call them, Margaret."

"But they are advances from a man like Colonel Clive, mamma," said Margaret; "and we must remember he has right on his side."

"I do not know that, Margaret. He tormented poor Agatha from morning till night, or she would never have gone away from him."

The reply was on Margaret's lips that no tormenting could justify the step; but the point had been argued again and again, and she had learnt never to continue a disputed topic, unless some positive good were to be gained by it.

"And now about this letter," said Mrs. Percival; "must Agatha see it? If she does, she will feel as I do."

"It seems to me that we are bound to act openly with her," replied Margaret.

"And lose our object! I must differ from you, my dear, entirely. State the case to her gently and plausibly, and she will listen to reason, and may by degrees be brought round. Shock her by such a cold, business-like note as this, and she will never allow the subject to be named."

The point was a difficult one, yet Margaret still persisted in her first opinion. She thought it right that Agatha should know precisely the terms on which she was to be received again. If she were to go to Ashington under false expectations, something in Colonel Clive's way of greeting her might provoke her indignation, and the result would be worse than before. To suppose that she was to be acknowledged with any great show of affection was most improbable. This question, as it was one of peculiar im-

portance, was discussed for some time; and Margaret's gentleness was at last rewarded by Mrs. Percival's saying—

"Well, my dear, the affair has been yours from the beginning, so manage it your own way; but remember, I prophesy that if Agatha sees this note, she will never return to Ashington."

CHAPTER LXXIV.

MARGARET knew Agatha better than Mrs. Percival did. It was not with her a question of affection, but of worldly expediency, whether she should or should not persist in the present separation. Having decided that it was most desirable not to do so, the manner of reunion was a secondary consideration. Certainly she would have been pleased if great eagerness had been expressed for her return; and Mrs. St. Aubyn's note was undoubtedly repelling rather than otherwise. But Colonel Clive was a cross elderly man, labouring under an impending fit of the gout; and Mrs. St. Aubyn was a fashionable, silly woman, caring for no one as much as for herself. Little could be expected from either in the way of graciousness, and, in her inmost heart, Agatha's conscience whispered that little was deserved. Margaret had not much difficulty in persuading her to express something like regret at what had passed; a regret which was repeated in the answer to Mrs. St. Aubyn; and then both waited with a considerable degree of impatience for the next step. Margaret would willingly have taken advantage of the intermediate time to enforce upon her sister a few discoveries, which she had formerly made, as to the best mode of dealing with Colonel Clive's temper. He had some peculiarities, which, if opposed, rendered him furious; others, which, if soothed, kept him placid. He liked always to be made the first, to be consulted even on subjects not within his sphere of action. He was fanciful about the placing of furniture, very exact in punctuality; he could not endure any person to be praised whom he had previously blamed; he always chose to settle in the morning exactly what was to be done during the day, and never, if he could avoid it, walked when he had arranged to drive, or drove when he had decided upon walking; and this was a rule which he endeavoured to make binding upon every one else. These, and others of a similar kind, were old bachelor ways, very irksome, but not unendurable; and Margaret was sure that, if Agatha would consult

them, she might lead a comparatively tranquil life. But Agatha was going back to Ashington with no such principle of submission. She never intended again to commit herself by an open quarrel, but she was resolved to rule; and the determination was shown in the course of this evening's conversation, with a clearness, that made Margaret almost regret what she had done to promote her return. It seemed as if misery must be the result.

And could it well be otherwise? When the highest, the most sacred of all human ties, is formed, without reference to the favour of God, upon a principle of worldly calculation, have we any right to expect aught but disappointment and wretchedness to spring from it? We "sow the wind," and marvel that we are made to "reap the whirlwind." Agatha was excited, but far from happy in her prospects. There were recollections associated with Ashington never to be forgotten, and the expectation of returning to it vividly recalled the circumstances under which she had left it. But her mind was fixed, or rather she endeavoured to make it fix, principally upon the gratification to be derived there from worldly enjoyments. Margaret was keenly sensible that the eyes of the world would be upon her; even as Agatha's sister she could scarcely endure the thought of the gossip and observations which would follow; and she was only too glad to think of the time when the family should have removed to Alton, and be beyond the reach of notice. But Agatha braved, or pretended to brave, all this. "The world," she said, "had no right to make remarks, and if persons chose to blame her, they must. She was satisfied in knowing that no one could be aware of half the provocation she had received."

It was whilst in this proud mood on the following morning, when Agatha was with Margaret in the library, superintending the taking down of some family pictures, that Mrs. St. Aubyn was suddenly announced. There had been a mistake of the servant who opened the door, and she was shown into the library. Agatha did then feel very uncomfortable, and was more grateful to Margaret than she had ever been before, for covering her confusion. It was the first time, except in talking to her uncle, that she had really perceived how wrongly she had acted. Mrs. St. Aubyn asked for a private interview with Margaret, and after retiring with her for some time, Margaret reappeared alone. She looked hurried, and seemed at a loss how to begin what she had to say; but after a moment's pause, breaking at once into the middle of her subject, she said, "Mrs. St. Aubyn is come, Agatha, to ask if you will go with her to Ashington directly."

"Me! directly!" and Agatha's cheek became very pale. "She cannot mean directly."

"Yes, indeed, she does. She has just been there. Colonel Clive is quite willing, it seems; but Mrs. St. Aubyn did not tell him what she meant to do, because she is sure that if you go there unexpectedly it will be much better."

"I cannot. I have not a thing prepared," said Agatha, now really frightened.

"We can manage all that. I will see about it for you. Indeed, Agatha, you must go."

"But not alone. You will come with me."

"How can I? Mrs. St. Aubyn never said a word of the kind."

"Then I shall not go without you," exclaimed Agatha. "To be alone with Mrs. St. Aubyn, and be lectured, and treated like a naughty child! No, Margaret, you may be quite certain I will not do that."

"Mamma is the proper person," said Margaret, thinking; "but she and Mrs. St. Aubyn will not do together."

"No," said Agatha with a faint laugh. "They will be at daggers drawn before they reach their journey's end."

Agatha's manner, however, was more than half assumed; and after walking a few steps across the room, she sat down, saying, that her heart was beating, and she could not stand. Margaret brought her sal volatile, went up stairs to fetch her bonnet and shawl, and then begged her to go to her mother, who had already been told of Mrs. St. Aubyn's proposal. Still Agatha delayed. She was so free at home, her mother was so indulgent, and Margaret so considerate. The little cottage at Alton, the small garden, and the limited income, did not appear totally devoid of charms. "If I had not agreed," she began.

"But you have, dearest; and you cannot draw back, even if it were right. You must not keep Mrs. St. Aubyn waiting."

"I must have you with me, Margaret."

"We will see. Go to mamma, and I will talk to Mrs. St. Aubyn."

Agatha came down stairs again with tearful eyes. Her mother had blessed her, prayed that she might be happy,—and a mother's blessing, even to the cold-hearted, can never be of trifling value. Margaret was prepared to accompany her, and Mrs. St. Aubyn was already in the hall. Agatha looked round for the children, but Margaret would not suffer her to delay, for Mrs. St. Aubyn was evidently impatient. Agatha sat far back in the carriage,

and drew down her veil. She did now, at last, comprehend what it was to shrink from public observation, to dread lest some dear friend or intimate acquaintance should remark that she was driving again with Mrs. St. Aubyn on the road to Ashington, and spread the report, adorned and illustrated, of her reunion with her husband.

"You are faint, dear," said Margaret, in alarm, as they drove through the park gates.

Agatha shook her head; her faintness was more of the mind than the body. She was thinking of that morning when, in the cold grey dawn, she had parted from her husband's house a childless mother. Margaret was more frightened even than she had anticipated: responsibility seemed attached to her. But for her efforts the meeting might never have taken place. It is happy for us when events are beyond our own control; for at that moment Margaret would scarcely have ventured to move a finger to restore her sister to her home. Mrs. St. Aubyn alighted first, and hastened on. Margaret assisted Agatha; she could not bear the surprised, prying eyes of the servants.

"Just one moment, only one, wait," whispered Agatha, as they stood in the hall; but Margaret, with a desperate resolution, forced her to lean upon her arm, and they followed Mrs. St. Aubyn.

"Your master is in the study, I suppose?" said Mrs. St. Aubyn to the butler.

"Yes, ma'am, he has been sitting there all day."

"Perhaps I had better go first," said Mrs. St. Aubyn kindly, and really compassionating Agatha.

That seemed the most humbling moment of all. In her own house to be compelled to act as a stranger! She sat down in the little ante-room, and Margaret beside her. They heard Colonel Clive's gruff voice, and Mrs St Aubyn's more lengthened reply; and immediately afterwards the study-door opened, and the Colonel, leaning on his gouty stick, came out. This was much more than Margaret had expected. She glanced at Agatha to express her satisfaction; but Agatha was now cold and proud, as in her proudest days. She moved a few steps towards her husband and stopped. Mrs. St. Aubyn came to her assistance. "We are going to say good bye to the past, and enjoy the present," she said, in a light easy tone, as if speaking upon the most indifferent subject. "And now, I must just shake hands with you both, and tell you how extremely glad I am to see you together and then, Margaret, you and I had better not keep the carriage."

"Wait, pray wait," escaped from Agatha's lips, as Colonel Clive held her hand in his, and afterwards kissed her cheek. Repentance for the folly of her marriage was stronger than ever. Margaret guessed her feelings,—there was hopelessness in them. Mrs. St. Aubyn ran on a few sentences about engagements, and delay, and the weather, and other commonplaces;—and Colonel Clive, rejoiced to have surmounted the first difficulty, began to inquire for Mrs. Percival and the rest of the family. In the extreme awkwardness of the interview he had become quite philantrophic, and even remembered to ask for Juliet, and to inquire whether Symonds had left them.

Agatha did her utmost to join in the observations: conversation it could not be called; but Margaret read in her abstracted manner the dreadful weight which lay upon her heart. Mrs. St. Aubyn was soon tired of the part she had to act, and again wished to hasten Margaret away. Agatha's imploring glance, however, determined her to remain.

"She would walk back," she said; "it would not be too far; and Mrs. St. Aubyn would, by that means, be left at liberty."

"Then we shall not meet again to-day," observed Mrs. St. Aubyn, as she said good-bye to her brother; "I leave you in better hands."

The Colonel smiled—what was for him a good-humoured smile, being really glad to have some one to cheer his solitude, and particularly relieved at having escaped a scene. He was thankful to his wife for her apparent impenetrability, and again took her hand with something which would fain have been affection. Agatha bore with him for a moment; but then she drew back, and hurrying from the room beckoned to Margaret to follow. Her countenance revealed the anguish of her mind as she re-entered her own chamber. It was a fixed despairing look—still and vacant. Margaret stood near in silence. There are some trials; trials which we have brought upon ourselves, for which no words of comfort can be found.

"Oh, Margaret!" exclaimed Agatha at length, in a hollow voice. "You persuaded me to return."

"And I was right, dearest. You are now in your appointed place; and I am sure he is pleased that you should be here."

Agatha shuddered. "I could have endured reproaches better," she said; "I should have been roused to answer them. It is worse now than ever, for it comes to me all new and strange. Margaret! it is horrible!"

"But duty," said Margaret; "only strive to think of your

duty; and if you can soothe him and make him happy, you will feel differently in time."

"Soothe him!" Agatha's heart recoiled from the idea. She, who in marriage, had thought but of riches, luxury, independence, now to rest her hope of happiness upon her power of soothing!

"He has borne very much," said Margaret, almost afraid to say how thankful she really was for Colonel Clive's ready forgiveness, lest it should exasperate her sister farther.

"Borne! — yes; would that he had borne yet more — that the parting had been ——! Margaret, death would be better than such a life."

Margaret's imploring countenance brought Agatha to a calmer state. "You may condemn me, Margaret," she said; "but the fault was not mine. My mother taught me that riches could make me happy without love; and how could I tell then what it would be to despise my husband? Yes," she added, with something of her former vehemence, — "to despise him!" Agatha buried her face in her hands, in gloomy misery. Margaret could not resolve upon leaving her, though it was necessary. Perhaps there was no sorrow, that she had not actually felt, in which she could more entirely sympathise. But the thought, which in a similar case, might have aroused her to life and exertion, was not one likely to have an effect upon Agatha. Still Margaret felt that she must try. There was one view, and one only, which could be taken of her sister's present position, that offered any real consolation.

"Listen to me, dearest Agatha," she said, gently withdrawing her sister's hands, and forcing her to look up. "Why dwell only upon the past? It might have been the error of your education, or your mistake, or both;—but now it is irretrievable."

"And is that comfort?" exclaimed Agatha, indignantly.

"Yes, in a measure it is. If this trial had been ordered by God, as the circumstances as our birth are, you would see how to bear it patiently."

"But it is not. It is of my own seeking," said Agatha, in a stern moody tone.

"Yet you may act as if it were not. You may endeavour to turn it to its best account; and in so doing, it may be blest to you."

"Blest! A life with him!"

"Yes, with him: though not such a life as you once anticipated. If you respected him ——"

"If! if!" interrupted Agatha, ironically.

"Nay," continued Margaret, quietly; "it is not an impossibility. Talent, your husband can never have; but an earnest, sincere, upright heart, he may have. God may give it him in answer to your prayers; and it is not talent which we respect, but goodness."

Agatha's eye wandered round the room till it rested upon the small empty crib which stood in one corner. Then she dashed her hand across her eyes to wipe away the agonizing tears that rushed to them.

"We think that it would have been better," continued Margaret, following the direction of her sister's glance, "if your darling had been spared to comfort you."

"It must have been," said Agatha, in an under tone.

"Not if you should learn the sooner to prepare to follow it: and if he should learn also. Agatha, dearest! you may teach him; you may show him what it is to be meek and forbearing; you may make him love goodness, and then he will practise it. It is your work upon earth now."

"No, Margaret, not mine: I have no goodness."

"But to strive," said Margaret; "to labour, and watch, and pray, that is for us all."

"You cannot think that he will change," said Agatha.

"I can and do think it; if you will use your influence in the right way. If you will begin first by watchfulness over yourself. And, Agatha, indeed he has had much to forgive."

Agatha's spirit was, for the time, partially subdued, and she bore the reproof without resentment.

"If you could begin to-day," continued Margaret, "in the little things, to consult his wishes; thinking for him, now he is ill; reading to him, trying to order what he likes, you would feel kindly to him, and there would be an interest, and it would be your business; even if you saw no improvement in him, you would in yourself. But he would improve; he must, if you will also pray to be forgiven and helped."

Agatha put her arm round her sister's waist as she sat beside her, and turning to her, said,

"Margaret, you were born to be the blessing of your family. If it were your lot, rather than mine, all would be well."

Margaret rose to go,—"God has given us each that duty which is most suited to us," she said, thoughtfully. "Yours may be better performed than mine."

"You do not still retain your wild, self-sacrificing notion?" exclaimed Agatha.

"Yes, indeed I do; but this is not the moment to speak of it. I would rather think of you. We shall see each other every day now until we leave home."

"Home!" repeated Agatha; and the word was sad to Margaret's ear. That peaceful home of their childhood! how little had it been rightly prized by either!

"You will come down stairs with me," said Margaret, entreatingly.

Agatha hesitated, and the repulsive manner appeared again.

"This will be the first effort," said Margaret. "If you could show the least attention, I think now it would be accepted."

But stubborn, rebellious thoughts were working in Agatha's breast. She could care little for him who had cared so little for his child; and she said it. Margaret thought that all her efforts had been thrown away; but she made one more appeal.

"If your sweet baby could speak now," she said; "her voice would have more power than mine. All is forgiven where she is."

Margaret watched her sister's face with some anxiety, for there were times when Agatha would not endure the least allusion to subjects connected with religion. Something, however, in Margaret's tone or manner, perhaps it was the simple earnestness, had touched Agatha, for she led the way herself to the study. Margaret's parting words were quickly said; but they were cordial and grateful to Colonel Clive, and full of affection towards her sister; and as she left the room, she saw Agatha push her husband's writing-desk and table into a more convenient position, and arrange the cushions in his gouty chair. Was it a sign of the dawning of a better day?

CHAPTER LXXV.

And now all home cares, but one, were taken from Margaret's mind. Agatha restored to her husband, her mother's future plans fixed, and the arrangements for removing to Alton almost completed — there was but one thing still undecided, and Margaret, having nearly reached home, was considering how she should best induce her mother to give an immediate, definite, and satisfactory answer with regard to George and Philip, when she saw her uncle's horse at the Grove gate. Her heart bounded with something almost approaching to happiness. Where Mr. Sutherland

was, comfort, and hope, and peace seemed always to follow. "I expected you to-morrow, but not to-day!" she exclaimed, as she hastened up to him.

Mr. Sutherland dismounted in his ordinary quiet manner, taking no notice of any one till he had seen his horse carefully led away to the stable, and then his face brightened, and as he greeted Margaret affectionately, he told her the business which had brought him over; the same business which had occupied her. "I heard indirectly to-day," he said, "that Mr. Dampier grows impatient upon this subject, and the delay is rather unpardonable. Margaret, we must make your mother settle something."

"We will," said Margaret; "but you must let me tell you our good news first. Mamma may be more inclined to listen to us now that Agatha is at Ashington."

"Ashington! Agatha at Ashington so quickly?"

"You forget you have not been here for some days, and I told you that events were working to this some time since. But you shall hear;" and Margaret led him into the garden, and recounted in detail the circumstances which had brought about the reconciliation. Mr. Sutherland was hopeful, but not quite as much so as Margaret wished. She thought that Agatha's eyes were really opening to the folly of her conduct. He feared that she was acting under a transient impression, and that, although an improvement might really take place for a time, both parties would eventually return to their former state. He would not, however, damp Margaret's expectations. She had enough that was real to oppress her without burdening her with fears for the future. "And, now you have eased your anxiety about others," he said, "you shall talk to me about the person who is always last in your consideration—yourself."

Margaret guessed what this meant, and would fain have avoided the subject.

"You are looking fagged," continued Mr. Sutherland.

"I am a little, I know; but I shall be better at Alton."

This was not quite sincere, for it was an endeavour to escape from an unpalatable topic; and Margaret was conscious of it directly she had spoken. "I mean," she added, "that I shall be quiet at Alton, and have less to do."

"Then you intend remaining there?"

Margaret looked at him with an attempt at a smile; but it was very forced. "How can I tell?" she replied. "You are the person to decide. I have tried to let the matter rest myself; but

if we are to bring my mother to a determination immediately, my plans must be settled likewise."

"There lies the difficulty," said Mr. Sutherland. "Margaret, you will be candid with me, I am sure."

"If possible, I will; but the truth is, I can scarcely be candid with myself: I do not thoroughly know my own mind."

"That will not do if you are to teach others;" observed Mr. Sutherland. "The inquiry becomes a very serious one then. You must forgive me, Margaret, for thrusting it upon you. I cannot help considering myself answerable for the step you are wishing to take."

"I shall never convince you of my sincerity," replied Margaret; "that is, not my sincerity, but my resolution. I promise you that my teaching shall be strictly in accordance with the English Church."

"But that can scarcely be if your mind is imbued with Romanism; if it dwells upon it."

"It does not dwell more than I can help," replied Margaret, "and I have given up all my Romish books."

"But not your Romish affections, dearest Margaret. Your heart still clings to the Countess. Whilst she remains in England I must have fears for you."

"She will not remain in England," said Margaret, trying vainly to speak with indifference. "I have heard through Mrs. St. Aubyn that she is going abroad."

Mr. Sutherland did not give utterance to the relief which he felt, and answered in a tone of affectionate compassion, "My poor child, this must be very hard for you to hear."

"It has been very hard," said Margaret, "to hear it from such a source; but it has done me good in one way; it has convinced me that I was wrong in trusting to the return of her affection. Father Andrea doubtless finds that she still retains her anger."

"But he has not said so."

"No, that perplexes me. Yet he may see that she has given me up, and not have the heart to tell me so. I try not to expect to hear anything more about them; still the wish is ever present. You are not vexed with me for it, are you?"

"Vexed! no, indeed, my love. I would give a great deal to set your mind at ease. To part in anger and mistrust is to bear a burden through one's whole life."

"There was neither on my part," said Margaret meekly; "but I know I gave her cause for annoyance, if not suspicion, about Agatha. I did not treat her with the confidence she deserved,

and I cannot remember what I said in the letter: I was too wretched. She cannot be wrong, but I may be."

Mr. Sutherland could not agree to this; but he would not distress Margaret by blaming Beatrice. Secretly he accused her of caprice; and, much as he desired Margaret to relinquish her friendship, he still longed to give her the comfort of a few last words of affection. "I will not ask you to forget her, Margaret," he said. "I know too well myself how fondly memory clings to those whom yet we would not for worlds recall to dwell with us; but I am sure you will see, by-and-by, how mercifully all these events have been ordered, and how these external circumstances have assisted you in turning from the temptations of Romanism. You have had no solicitations to struggle against."

"No," replied Margaret; "sometimes I think that my strength has been untried."

"I cannot really doubt that it would stand," observed Mr. Sutherland; "but it would be scarcely right to undertake such a change as you contemplate until you are more certain of yourself."

"And when will that be?" asked Margaret, "and what is to be done in the interim?"

"It is now July," replied Mr. Sutherland. "George need not return to Oxford until October. Before that time there is every reason to hope that, by prayer and constant effort, your mind will have become more settled. At Alton we shall be together constantly, and you shall work under me in the parish, and we will read and talk together, and enjoy the blessing of the daily services; and I think you will see that the English Church, when her principles are carried out, does not leave her children destitute of guidance."

Margaret sighed. It was a bright picture, but all the more dark was the separation that was to follow it. She was resolved, however, not to allow herself to be diverted from the actual business before her, by any morbid or even innocent anticipations of future sorrow; and she now inquired how it would be possible to defer her own plans until the autumn, and yet give an immediate answer to Mr. Dampier.

"It has struck me," continued Mr. Sutherland, "that, under any circumstances, it would be wise, if your mother will consent, to accept the proposal at once for Philip, and leave George to be provided for in some different way. If it cannot be by taking orders, we must hope that other prospects will open for him. He is steady and clever, and his education has been extremely good.

I really have no fear for him; but Philip may be an anxiety to you for years, unless you take advantage of the present opening. A public school is exactly the training he will require; and it can be no injustice to George, as he hates the idea of the merchant's office, and told me this morning at breakfast that, except as a matter of positive duty, he would not accept it on any terms. Of course he knows nothing of your plans."

"Then we may go at once to mamma with the proposition," said Margaret. "Is it impatient to wish that my own future lot could be settled at the same time?"

"Perhaps it may be. I would not say, Margaret, that impatience was not your besetting sin."

Margaret stopped in her walk, as if to consider. She could never feel angry with her uncle, however he might reprove her. "Impatience with the children?" she said, in a musing tone.—"Yes, I think I can see it there. I was, and I am too eager for perfection."

"That was the cause of the era of day dreams," said Mr. Sutherland, smiling; "and then came the Church."

"Came!" said Margaret, sadly; "it is the present, not the past."

"It is more the past, I hope, than it was. I think you can bear better with irregularities and inconsistencies than you did."

"It seems wrong to bear with them sometimes," said Margaret, "as if one was becoming lukewarm."

"It can never be wrong to bear with that which it is out of our power to remedy; and there is one mode in which we may all indulge our zeal to the utmost. We may pray, pray for perfection, and then rise from our prayer to act meekly and strenuously under a state of imperfection."

"And see the Church of Rome working at our side with such gigantic machinery," said Margaret.

"Yes; and yet labour diligently in our own sphere, though our hands may be tied, and our feet crippled. It is, we know, a fact in natural philosophy, that the deprivation of one sense quickens the powers of the others; so it may be, and so it may be intended to be, in the Church."

"And how?" inquired Margaret.

"Look at cases similar to your own," replied her uncle. "There are a thousand such at this moment in England, setting aside the snares of Romanism which were peculiarly thrown in your path — cases of young persons whose eyes are becoming open to Church principles, who are very eager and sincere, longing to

work for the Church, conscious of their own deficiencies, willing to throw themselves into the hands of any one having authority to guide them. Now the training which may be required for their minds may be precisely the reverse of that which in our ignorance we believe good for them. To give them strength it may be necessary that the power of exercising their newly-awakened senses should be for a time suspended, that they should be thrown back upon themselves, not allowed to rest upon others."

"But there can be no strength without Church ordinances," said Margaret.

"Nay, Margaret. Ordinances are valuable because they are means of grace. Grace is the gift of God, and God is everywhere. If, for instance, from unavoidable circumstances, any individual, earnest-minded and devoted, is deprived of the blessing of daily services and frequent communions, there cannot be a doubt that the loss will be supplied by prayer, and the diligent use of the blessings still left; and when the desired occasion is granted, that person's faith may be all the stronger, because for a time he has been left without external support."

"I do not feel that it will ever be so with me," said Margaret.

"But I feel it, and am certain of it. It is so now, though you cannot perceive it. The simple rule is, to make the very utmost of whatever is given us, remembering that the least is infinitely more than we deserve."

"It would be easier to be satisfied, if we could exclude the view of Romanism," said Margaret.

"I should not agree with you, if you mind were in any other state," replied Mr. Sutherland. "It is a one-sided view which you take of the Romish Church. You see the good, but you never think of the evil. If you look at Romanism at all, you are bound to look upon it as a whole. Put Ireland by the side of England. Indulgences for sin, by penance, when it is committed. Secret infidelity, by the side of public sanctity. The evils of confession, by its good. The widely differing and contradictory statements, by the professed infallibility. Romanism is an immense field, embracing centuries that are past, and spreading itself over the whole world. View it in part, and you may fall down and worship. View it entirely, and you must look upon it with awe as the greatest mystery, the most wonderful combination of evil and good which has ever been exhibited to mankind."

"Yet persons may be excused," said Margaret, "if they find it difficult to work for the English Church whilst she is so fettered."

"Let them try," answered Mr. Sutherland: "if they cannot have the public services, they may maintain the principle of unity by the appointed reading in private; and there are those who have found the daily prayers of the Church, even in their own closets, a very great help and comfort. So again if Saints' days, fasts and vigils are not observed, they may mark them by unostentatious practice in secret. If there are no sisterhoods or fraternities devoted to the service of the poor, they may content themselves by visiting the poor under the sanction and direction of their own clergyman. The responsiblity in these matters lies not with the many, but the few."

Margaret could not help contrasting the sobriety of this advice with the ardent eloquence of Father Andrea. She could not yet choose between them; yet unwearied energy without external aid must necessarily be more rare of attainment than with it; and she asked herself whether the life of a saint might not then be within her reach as fully as if she were dwelling within convent walls.

Mr. Sutherland was more satisfied than he had expected to be with the little which Margaret had said. He was thankful and hopeful; and concluded the conversation as they re-entered the house, by expressing his belief, that ere long she would find full peace under all disadvantages; adding, nevertheless, "the blessings, of which we have spoken, are of infinite value, and we will not cease to pray that they may at length be enjoyed by all. And now we will go to your mother."

The conversation with Mrs. Percival was long, and unsatisfactory, especially to Margaret. Her mother seemed bent upon taking the most gloomy view of every subject brought forward. She could own, that it was desirable for Mr. Dampier's offer to be accepted for Philip; but instead of looking at the relief of having him provided for, she would dwell principally, almost indeed entirely, upon the loss to George; with his education, his hopes, his great talents, it was a grievous disappointment. Her gratitude for Mr. Dampier's liberality was quite neutralised for the time by the conditions he had annexed to it. Margaret hoped that it might not be an unfavourable moment for referring to her own views, and said that her uncle agreed in thinking that in October, if her wishes remained the same, it might be desirable to put them in execution. But this hint only made Mrs. Percival the more wretched. She declared that she had long anticipated a change. She knew they must come to ruin. Craven's conduct had been most unjustifiable; but she had never

imagined that one of her daughters could be reduced to be a governess. Margaret softened the idea as much as possible by saying that it would only be for a short time. They might all look forward to the period of George's ordination, when he would return to Alton to be his uncle's curate, and live with them. For a moment Mrs. Percival's face brightened; but that day was too far off to be reckoned upon, and Margaret would, she asserted, be marked for life.

"Marked only as hundreds and hundreds of others higher and better than myself have been, dear mamma," said Margaret.

"That may be, but it makes no difference; and I cannot help thinking there must be some way of escape. It seems as if, now that Agatha is at Ashington —"

"Oh! no, no, mamma," exclaimed Margaret; "if they had millions we could not accept anything from them. Obligation to Colonel Clive!"

Mr. Sutherland interposed a warning. "Take care, Margaret. We must not be proud, even as regards incurring obligations. But," he added, "it is quite true that you would suffer much more in the end; and just now, after Agatha's conduct, the case would become still more awkward."

"Impossible! quite!" replied Margaret, eagerly; but her uncle's reproof of impatience came to her mind, and she added, in a more subdued tone, "Dear mamma! if we could only make you think as we do!"

Mrs. Percival was much distressed. Her reason could find nothing more to object, yet her feelings were as strongly opposed as ever. It was the publicity, the observations, which she dreaded, and against these Margaret could bring no arguments. They were more painful to her than she would ever have allowed her mother to imagine. Mr. Sutherland perceived that they had gained ground, although not a victory, and now proposed that the subject should be left for the present. "A few weeks hence," he said, "they might all be able to look at it more dispassionately, and since they had settled the immediate question, the other would bear delay."

Margaret tried not to be vexed, but she was inclined to complain of both her mother and her uncle, for not sufficiently considering how much this continued suspense must cost her. Her spirits were more depressed than they had been at all, and Mrs. Percival was so wretched that she kept her room the whole evening. Margaret could scarcely rally, even with her uncle's assistance. The house was extremely uncomfortable, a great

part of the books and furniture having been already forwarded to Alton. One sofa only remained in the drawing-room, and one table. The dining-room sideboard was gone, and her father's favourite arm-chair. Margaret missed that more than anything; she recollected it from infancy. There was nothing to enliven her within-doors, and without, the air was chilly, and the sky gloomy; whilst the long twilight was a reason for not sitting down to any regular occupation. The children played in the garden until quite late, and their voices were as merry as if care and sorrow had never invaded their home. Yet Margaret could not envy them; the happiness was but for the present hour. She had enjoyed it once herself; but as surely as affliction had come to her, so surely, if God spared their lives, must it one day come to them. Mr. Sutherland did his utmost to cheer her, sometimes by hopeful anticipations, and at others by more serious considerations; and Margaret liked to listen to him; but his words did not fully reach her heart. Her thoughts would wander back perpetually to the preceding year. Just at that time she had been so very happy with Beatrice, and her home had been so cheerful. She could have prophesied then that years would pass without bringing a change. But, before they separated for the night, Mr. Sutherland proposed a scheme which gave Margaret something to think of and rest upon. He saw that they were lingering unnecessarily at the Grove. Alton was in a certain degree ready for them, and they might if they chose go there at once; and it certainly seemed to him that it would be best. The carriage was to be kept for another month, so that they might drive over from time to time and give orders; but the principal work which now required to be done must be entrusted to the servants. Baker would remain to superintend, and Symonds, who had expressed a wish to stay with his mistress until she was settled in her new home. Margaret did not entirely accord with this idea, for she did not wish Mrs. Percival to see the cottage at Alton until it had been put into a more complete state. There was much in first impressions, and her mother was particularly alive to them. When they had been there before she had expected nothing but an empty house, and of course did not care about it. Now, if she found only disorder and discomfort, it would be likely to add materially to her dejection. Mr. Sutherland doubted whether in any case this could be avoided, unless Margaret could herself be on the spot to superintend the arrangements; and he then suggested a plan, which he had previously rejected as perhaps less desirable for the family, though much more pleasant to him-

self, and, he hoped, better for Margaret; that she should go with him to Alton, occupy the cottage, and assist in putting it in order, and then return to the Grove to make the final arrangements for leaving it.

In this proposal Mr. Sutherland had views distinct from the general comfort. There were no external aids in the parish of Deering to assist Margaret in acquiring that reverence for the English Church which would be her chief safeguard in any future efforts that might be made by Father Andrea or the Countess; and how soon these might be attempted he could not tell. Margaret had never yet been in a position to judge of the working of the English Church, and when Mr. Sutherland gave her instances of the zeal, and judgment, and self-denial with which in England the clergy were exerting themselves for their people, he could perceive something of incredulousness in her manner. It was much easier to believe what she saw, than what she heard. At Alton, though Mr. Sutherland would have been the first to acknowledge deficiencies, there was much which might have the effect of strengthening her mind; and with this view he now proposed to her to return with him the succeeding day. Margaret was thankful for the proposal, though she could not at once agree to leave her mother; but Mr. Sutherland urged it strenuously, showing her that it would in the end be for the good of all; and she was at length prevailed upon to seek Mrs. Percival's consent.

They were melancholy minutes which Mr. Sutherland spent during her absence. There had come no change to him; he was a solitary man—independent—prosperous: yet as he stood in the desolate, dismantled room, and listened in vain for a sound to break the death-like stillness, memory recalled bright hours and happy faces, and seasons of enjoyment which could never more return, and thought turned from the deserted house to him who had been its master, now lying in his grave; and the anguish of recollection was for the moment as completely overpowering to him, as it could have been to those whose life was, as it were, from this time to begin anew. Margaret came back to her uncle, and said more cheerfully that her mother had consented to his plan, and was rather pleased with it. Mr. Sutherland could scarcely smile, though for Margaret's sake he tried to do so; and after a little more conversation they separated, and Margaret went to her room more resigned and more willing to believe that everything would eventually work for happiness as well as good.

CHAPTER LXXVI.

It was but a cheerless prospect for Margaret, when she alighted at the gate of the little cottage which was from henceforth to be her home. Her description to Miss Debrett had been very correct; but though an unprejudiced eye might have discovered without difficulty many good points about the place, Margaret was now chiefly struck by the dust and confusion, and the piles of furniture which filled the house, seeming as if no room could by any possibility be found for them. Mr. Sutherland left her to decide for herself what was best to be done, whilst he went to his parish duties. "He would return," he said, "before long, and see what progress she was making; but he hoped she would try and not fatigue herself too much, as he had set his heart upon taking her for a walk in the evening." His concluding words were, "We dine early, not to interfere with the evening service." Margaret was little accustomed to the idea of going to church on the week-days, and could scarcely comprehend what it would be like; but there was something tranquillising in the idea. The walk she soon decided would be out of the question. It was very well for Mr. Sutherland to propose it; but he had never assisted in the business of removal from one home to another, and could have no idea of the exertion it required. She tried to sit still herself, and give orders; but this, it was soon found, was not sufficient; and when Mr. Sutherland came to her about a quarter of an hour before dinner, he found her completely wearied. It was a tête-à-tête dinner, the curate being absent, much to Margaret's satisfaction, as she was little inclined for conversation with a stranger. Mr. Sutherland was glad also. This was what he had often wished,—to have Margaret to himself in his own parish. Perhaps, if it had been possible before, she might have been spared many trials of faith and principles; but it was too late, even if it had been right, to wish that circumstances had been differently appointed. Margaret acknowledged voluntarily that the vicarage was all she could have pictured as the residence of a country clergyman. It was small, but pretty, and convenient, and so simple in its furniture and arrangements, that she could not fix upon anything which might be dispensed with, even for the purpose of assisting George at college. Mr. Sutherland talked to her of his parish and his housekeeping; and as a dinner was sent from the table, he said, "It is for a poor girl, Margaret, whom I should like you

to see. She is not in want; but illness makes persons fastidious, and it is a pleasure to give her pleasure. I think sometimes she may resemble the one you knew, who died at Henningsley."

The name sounded strangely unnatural to Margaret in that new place, and under circumstances unconnected with the past. A dreamy indistinctness came over everything, and even with her uncle it seemed that Alton could never be her home. Mr. Sutherland did not press the subject; but Margaret renewed it by remarking, "that Rhoda was by nature no common person; and that her religion made her still more peculiar."

"Probably," replied Mr. Sutherland. "Romanism is especially suited for enthusiastic minds."

"And can you allow that the English Church is insufficient for the case you named?" inquired Margaret, quickly.

"No, not for a moment; but there is one great difference, I imagine, in the two instances. In the one, enthusiasm found vent in religion; in the other, religion has subdued and directed enthusiasm."

"Perhaps so," replied Margaret, with an air of thought; but she did not seem satisfied, and Mr. Sutherland continued: —

"You shall judge for yourself, soon, and I will tell you a few facts beforehand."

"There must be great allowances made for difference of disposition," observed Margaret.

"Very great; it was for that reason I remember once expressing a wish to you that I could have an opportunity of visiting Romanists in seasons of severe illness. A single example is not sufficient to enable one to form a judgment of the temper of mind which the system is likely to cultivate."

"It gives peace," said Margaret: "yet not entirely so," she added, correcting herself.

"And peace is no sure test of truth," replied Mr. Sutherland. "A clergyman, above all, has reason to know that."

Margaret saw that the remark was connected with reminiscences of sadness, and felt unwilling to break the long silence which ensued. Mr. Sutherland at length looked up and smiled; but not such a smile as Margaret was accustomed to see, when he had shaken off care, and allowed himself rest at the Grove. "Alton habits are unsociable," he said. "I shall learn to make myself agreeable, now you are here."

"I would rather you should learn to do just what you are accustomed to do," replied Margaret, as she rose from the table.

"I am not certain that my customs are good, Margaret. It is

very well to think, but one may think till one is inclined to despair."

"You! here!" exclaimed Margaret, in surprise, "where you have everything as you desire it."

"Everything but one; that which is my work and object."

"The human heart," said Margaret, gravely.

"And the charge of one's own being sufficient to occupy a whole life," continued Mr. Sutherland.

"It cannot be wise to think too deeply upon such a subject," observed Margaret; "no wonder that you look thin and care-worn."

Mr. Sutherland rather abruptly changed the conversation, and Margaret conjectured the cause. It was seldom that he spoke of himself, even to her. "You will be busy, I suppose now," he said, "until the time for evening service. I will come for you unless you are too tired. If you will take my advice, you will rest previously."

Margaret, however, when she returned to the cottage, was not inclined for rest. Occupation was a blessing: it left no room for melancholy thought, and there was a recollection which soothed her unconsciously; the knowledge that at a certain hour there would be a pause in the business of life; a season, when, for a short space, present grief and bitter memories, shame, and repentance, and self-distrust, and the undying hopes of the spirit born for immortality, might be laid open to the eye of the all-merciful God. Mr. Sutherland appeared at the appointed time. He had recovered his naturally cheerful look, and noticed with evident pleasure that two amongst Margaret's assistants at the cottage were preparing to accompany them.

"Yet we must not let them think that the mere going to church is a virtue," he said to Margaret: "they are sadly inclined to do so."

"It must be very difficult for the poor to find time," replied Margaret.

"Yes, for mothers it is. Indeed one can scarcely ever expect to see them; but the quietness of mind which the daily service brings would be an incalculable help to them in bearing the troubles of their lot. Some of the best of my people arrange to go alternately, morning and evening; and the neighbour who remains at home takes care of both families."

"I am not sure that I appreciate the benefit thoroughly," said Margaret.

"Wait till you have tried. There are a great many plausible,

and not irreligious, arguments to be used against the daily service; but there is one for it, which, independent of the directions of the Church, to me is conclusive. I have never heard of a single person in the habit of attending it voluntarily, who has not derived comfort and advantage from it. It is to the day what the Sunday is to the week."

"The home to which they go is a quiet one, at any rate," said Margaret, looking up at the church, which they now had nearly reached.

Mr. Sutherland stopped, and looked at it also, with an expression of reverent affection. "Yes," he said, "we are standing in the world now, and there are the graves, the visible symbols of death; and the building, which is the type of heaven. It must be a blessing to enter it morning and evening."

Margaret walked on in silence. They were a few minutes too early, and Mr. Sutherland remained to rest when they had ascended the little hill on which the church stood, that Margaret might enjoy the view from it. Margaret was tired with her day's work, and at home she would have believed it very difficult to continue to exert herself longer; but she did not think about it at that moment. Rest seemed at hand for her mind, and that might be as necessary as for the body.

"You have not seen my church since it has been restored," said Mr. Sutherland. "They were working at it a good deal whilst I was abroad, and now, at last, I think it is nearly all that it should be."

Margaret had not as much knowledge of architecture as she had taste for scenery, and her eye turned from the building to the landscape. The churchyard partly covered the summit of an eminence, terminating on the south in a steep bank of red sand, overhanging a clear, winding river. Mouldering tombstones, and half-legible names and dates, told of the generations after generations who had been borne through the Lich-gate at the north-east entrance, to be laid where the rude "forefathers of the hamlet" for ages had slept in peace. But neither the storms of nature, nor the more destructive hand of man, had left any traces of spoliation upon this quiet home of the dead, beyond the signs of slow decay shown in the crumbling of the grey stones, and the stains and indentations upon the inscriptions. Piety had guarded the consecrated ground from profanation, and flowers grew upon the graves, and the cypress and the yew spread their branches over them, luxuriant and uninjured. Without a thought of neglect or forgetfulness to jar upon it, the mind could revert from

death to life, and the carefully-tended, peaceful churchyard seemed but a fitting foreground for the beauty which lay around it. Yet it was not beauty of any striking kind. The deep clear stream glided swiftly and noiselessly onward, reflecting the purity of the summer sky and the fleecy clouds which floated over its surface; but its winding course was bordered only by broad green meadows, studded with trees, and backed by a soft, misty range of low hills. A few thatched cottages, and gardens bright with flowers, lay to the right; and on the left, a little higher than the churchyard, stood the vicarage. It was in the spirit which hallowed it, rather than in each separate detail, that the churchyard of Alton was lovely; but Margaret did not care to inquire into the sources of her pleasure. It was sufficient that she was calmed and refreshed by the bountiful gifts of God. Yet sadness soon followed her enjoyment; for all which she saw at Alton made her the more sensible of the trial it would be to live at a distance. Mr. Sutherland entered the church, and Margaret with him. Margaret had been in it once or twice before, and had often wondered to hear her uncle say that it possessed great capabilities, and might be made very beautiful. She had remarked herself that it was clean and well kept; but in point of architecture it appeared little superior to Deering; being filled with large square pews, darkened by galleries, and disfigured by blocked-up windows. Now it was indeed a church, a temple meet (so far as human art could render it) for the worship of God. The style was irregular; the aisles being divided on one side by short massive pillars, supporting early pointed arches, and on the other by columns of a later period. Perhaps the first effect was almost too sombre, from the thickness of the dark rafters, and the deep hues of the stained windows in the chancel; but the mellowed light softened the brilliancy of the colouring about the altar, and of the scrolls, bearing texts from Scripture, which were painted upon different parts of the edifice. That which might have been a loss in actual utility, was a gain in the effect which external causes insensibly inspire. The solemnity of the church was felt by Margaret instantaneously, and it prevented her from allowing her thoughts to be distracted by admiration. The change from the business of life to the sanctity of religion was brought vividly before her; and with comparatively little effort her attention fixed itself upon the service. It had never seemed so quiet, so hopeful; so suited to relieve the oppressive burden of sin, and point to the mercy which has provided a Ransom. And as Margaret listened to the absolution—really pro-

nounced as a pardon to those who truly repent—she acknowledged, in the secrecy of her own heart, that it was indeed a comfort to the weary spirit to be permitted to confess the weight of the day's offences, and receive the assurance of forgiveness. It was easier to guard her thoughts then, than it had ever been at Deering in the Sunday service. There, the words seemed more a matter of course; here, the few persons who were joining in the service, raised their voices in earnest devotion; and if Margaret's attention wandered, it was recalled by some reverent attitude, or peculiar emphasis, which showed that the worship was the worship of the heart. When the prayers were over, and the little congregation had left the church, Mr. Sutherland made Margaret walk round it, and pointed out its peculiar beauties. "He was teaching his people by degrees," he said, "to have it left always open. There were many times when solitude would be a great blessing to them; and yet, in their own crowded houses, they could not enjoy it. At certain hours the church was always kept unlocked; and by and by he hoped they would regard it with reverence enough to prevent any fear of desecration."

Margaret owned it might have a very beneficial effect, but there seemed few to enjoy it; the congregation was very small. Mr. Sutherland waited to reply. They were standing before the porch, looking through it upon the silvery waters of the river, which from that point seemed to flow immediately underneath the walls. When they emerged into the open air, he went to the edge of the bank, and leaning over it, said—

"Think, Margaret, of the beauty which God has spread abroad for our use; its profuseness, in desert spots where none can see it; its minuteness, so that much can only be discovered by a microscope; and its extent, embracing all things. How contrary this is, if one may venture to say so, to the utilitarian spirit of man!"

"But I did not mean," replied Margaret, "that I would not have any services because there were few to join in them. That always seems to me a most false argument, especially when we consider the promises made to prayer. I was only rather disappointed not to find a greater number of persons here."

"We are inclined to judge hardly of the poor, in this respect," replied Mr. Sutherland. "It is most difficult to arrange hours for them. The men at work must be in general out of the question. The spirit of the world has encroached upon the Church, and their time is not at their own disposal. But I am happy even in my small congregation. If others cannot come, we have

the satisfaction of thinking we are praying for them; and, if they can, and will not, we are a standing witness to them of their duty; to say nothing of the incalculable comfort to oneself."

"Yes, that I can imagine," said Margaret, thoughtfully.

"And you will imagine it more and more. I could never have believed how great it might be, if I had not tried it. It is like sleep when one is weary; or water when one is thirsty."

"But are you sure that you are not rather an exception than a rule?" said Margaret.

"No, indeed." Mr. Sutherland spoke with eagerness. "It is a curious fact, which I have watched lately, how the feeling, as well as the practice, of daily public prayer is spreading. Persons whom one meets with casually, without the slightest idea of ostentation, betray, by some slight allusion, the comfort it is to them. In fact, as to ostentation, there can be no more in going to church every day, than there is in doing so on Sunday."

"It certainly is a hopeful sign," observed Margaret.

"Yes, and it is but one amongst very many. Only the English clergy can tell how much there is now doing for the English Church; for they only have any idea of the accumulation of evils which they are labouring to uproot."

"And the courage it must require to undertake this task," said Margaret, "in the large towns, for instance."

"Yet, look at Eastlake. Ten years ago there was one church only; one clergyman, and an evening lecturer; a small neglected school; and the whole parish sunk in poverty and vice. At the present day there are three churches, and a fourth in contemplation; a body of curates working as one man under the rector; schools daily increasing; charitable institutions well-supported; and a society of visitors for the poor, who search into all the corners of misery, and bring every case before the notice of the clergy. This has been the improvement of ten years. It certainly is a cause for great faith in the inherent life and power of the English Church; though the rapid increase of population, and the spread of sectarian and infidel principles, may make one fear the fall of the English nation."

"Then Miss Debrett is not too sanguine in her expectations of what she will find at Eastlake?" said Margaret.

"Personally she may be. I daresay there will be a good many inconveniences and disappointments in store for her, in various ways. All clergymen are not faultless, and all poor people are not grateful, and willing to be taught. Yet, as a specimen of what the Church may do, I know no place more hopeful, if it were

He appeared also to have a personal knowledge of each child, and a peculiar faculty for remembering the family circumstances connected with them; a faculty which he afterwards told Margaret he did not naturally possess, but which he had trained himself to acquire, as one of the safest and best means of becoming their friend. In all this there was little that Margaret could think wonderful; still less, that would be likely to effect sudden and striking results; but she could not but perceive that all that was done was done thoroughly.

"We keep the Saints' days," said Mr. Sutherland, when they left the school, "by giving a half holiday, and making the few lessons which are learnt suitable particularly to the occasion; and I have been trying to impress the principle of the vigils and fast-days likewise; but negatively, rather than positively. *If* there are treats to be given, those seasons are avoided, and a special prayer is added at the opening and closing of school. Beyond this it may not be wise, and the Church does not require us to go with children."

"And you are not afraid of the imputation of being a Roman Catholic?" inquired Margaret.

"I had much to contend against at first from that cause," replied Mr. Sutherland. "But nothing is ever gained by concession; yield in one point, and you will be required to yield in others. Stand firm upon the authority of the Church, and not your own individual will, and the world will soon grow weary of molesting you."

"The authority of the Church," — it was a more definite idea to Margaret then, than it had been for many months — perhaps at all; and when she remarked the frugality of her uncle's table on this day, and his own simple self-denial, she was really willing to believe that a life above the world, a life of saintliness and discipline, might be practised in the English, as well as in the Romish Church.

CHAPTER LXXVII.

THE following morning brought a letter, rather to Margaret's surprise. Her mother was not in the habit of writing often, especially during such a short absence; and the first idea which presented itself was, that something must be amiss at the Grove. But the handwriting brought a smile: the characters were strag-

gling and nervous; the "t's" particularly well crossed; and the "i's" so plainly dotted as almost to be blots. "Think of my correspondent being Miss Debrett," said Margaret, holding up the direction for her uncle's inspection; "and a long letter too! What can she have to say?"

"Let me hear," said Mr. Sutherland, laughing, and owning himself very curious; "and leave off when you come to the secrets:" and Margaret, after glancing hastily over the pages, agreed that it would be no breach of confidence, and began:—

"My dear Margaret,

"I dare say you will be very much surprised at receiving a letter from me, never having received one before, that I can remember, except the little notes to ask you to drink tea, which you know were not letters; but I asked your dear mother, and she said she thought you would be glad to hear; and she did not mean to write herself, because she is busy with the packing; and when I went over, Symonds and the carpenter were taking down the damask curtains in the dining-room, which are to be sent by the van early on Monday morning; and your mother hopes, my dear Margaret, that you will give particular directions about their being put up properly, because she thinks they are too long; and she begged me to ask whether Mr. Sutherland could recommend any good, tidy girl, in the village, who would like a day's work, and undertake to shorten them. I dare say there will be no difficulty in this, for I hear all the Alton girls are good workers; and Susan tells me that one of her cousins went to school there, and has since been apprenticed to a dress-maker. But I hope, my dear, you will not forget, because your mother mentioned it particularly, and I changed my rings on purpose that I might remember. I write this first, that it may be off my mind; but what I meant to tell you about most, was my going over to Eastlake yesterday. Anne Duncan came over by the coach on purpose, and would hire a fly back, for me to return; and that was what made me consent, as I was very busy looking over the boxes in the top shelf of my wardrobe. It turned out to be a good thing, for I was able to take over the china jar which you helped me to pack. My cousin Anne admires your packing extremely, my dear Margaret, and I told her how clever you were, and she said she wished you would come over to Eastlake, which I hope you will do, for she assures me it is only one mile farther than it is from Alton here. You know where my cousin's house is, just past the corner of the High-street, a little to the right up the road, opposite the paling of Mr. De Lancy's place. I forget what the name is. We did

not get there till after two, and I was rather tired; for you know, my dear Margaret, I am not used to so much flurry. Anne wished me to stay and sleep; but that, I told her, I could not do, as there was no one at home, and I had brought nothing with me; except that Susan rode on the box. The reason my cousin wished me to go over was, that I might tell where I should like to have my things put, and see a little about the town; but I think it was rather a mistake, because, being so tired, I went to sleep on the sofa after dinner. However, Anne seemed pleased, and I must say there were some things which I liked very much. The rector, Mr. Henley, called in the afternoon. Anne says he is a very good man indeed, and keeps three curates, and means to have some more. He seemed to be a great friend of Anne's, and was very civil to me. I told him what a poor weak creature I was, and then he said he hoped the place would agree with me. He knew from Anne before that I was her cousin, and was going to live there, and he went on then about my helping her, which of course I should be very glad to do if I knew how. I said how bad my eyes were, and Anne mentioned my flannel work, and Mr. Henley promised I should have some, which I thought remarkably kind, since it could not be expected that a clergyman should know much about flannel work. He and Anne were going to see some poor person, and Anne persuaded me to put on my bonnet and shawl, and go too. I was rather glad I did, though it was not at all a pretty walk, down a back lane. Mr. Henley talked to me a good deal, and Anne told me afterwards that she thinks he means to ask me to undertake to read to a blind woman who lives near. I don't know what to say to it, my own eyes being bad, but I would do anything for her I could, as I said; and especially, if Mr. Henley liked it. He took my fancy extremely, he was so very attentive. He has no wife, and I could not help thinking, my dear Margaret, what a nice wife you would make for him. My cousin Anne thinks he is not a marrying man; but that I don't believe. However, I don't mean to put anything into your head, because nothing might come of it, and it does not do to be looking forward; only it would be very nice to have you settled here. I did not get home that evening till very late, nearly nine o'clock, indeed; but there was a full moon, and I did not so much care as I had expected. The children are very well, and sent you their kind love when I asked them what message I should give you. My cousin Anne thinks that if all the china is packed in the same way as the jar, it will go quite safely. I hope, my dear Margaret, you will not think anything of what I have said about Mr. Henley,

because it might make you unhappy, and I remember your dear mother not liking me to joke about poor Agatha and the Colonel. Mr. Henley is not at all old, and very good-looking, and I dare say he has plenty of money; but Anne Duncan said several times he was not a marrying man. I am sure you must be pleased to be with Mr. Sutherland. Give him my kindest remembrances, and just ask him if he knows anything about Mr. Henley.

"I am, my dear Margaret, with very kind love to yourself, your sincerely attached and most affectionate friend,

"PRISCILLA DEBRETT."

"I am really very fond of my sincerely attached and most affectionate friend," said Margaret, as she concluded the letter: "though I am not at all sure that our leaving the Grove is not by far the best thing that could have happened for her. It is amusing to see how a few kind words have won her heart."

"That I have heard is a great secret of the good which has been working at Eastlake," said Mr. Sutherland. "It is the fashion to form utopian schemes of Sisters of Charity,—and I am convinced that they would be very desirable,—but until such institutions can be founded, really founded, so as to stand, Henley has seized upon the stray persons in his parish, and set them all to work for him in different ways, and according to rules, which keep them under his own control; and so effects, not equal good, perhaps, but as much as is possible under the circumstances; and this without giving any offence."

"District visitors, in fact," said Margaret.

"Except that, besides the regular persons to act as visitors, he contrives to give every one something to do. Miss Debrett, for instance, is not fitted for a district visitor, but she is fitted to read to an old woman; and this he would perceive, and act upon. I have no doubt he will make her by degrees quite useful."

"All people have not Mr. Henley's discrimination, I am afraid," said Margaret.

"There may be a difficulty, certainly; but caution and practice would teach a good deal, and something of the kind must always be necessary. There are many persons who would never be Sisters of Charity, and yet need definite employment."

Margaret assented, remembering how thankfully she would have placed herself under some such guidance at Deering, instead of trying to find out duties for herself; with the risk of attempting more than she could perform, or neglecting those which lay within

her sphere: and Mr. Sutherland engaged when she came to reside in his parish that he would give her full instruction.

Before the close of the day, Margaret had quite finished all that it was in her power to do at the cottage, and was ready for a walk. As yet she had not enjoyed more than a stroll with her uncle in the vicarage garden, or along the side of the river; but on this, the last evening but one, she was to go with him to see the poor girl whom he had named on the first day of her arrival. Margaret liked the idea, though it made her very melancholy, as recalling thoughts of Henningsley and the Countess. Mr. Sutherland was not surprised to find her silent, and he himself seemed indisposed for conversation, until they came within sight of the farm-house to which they were going, when he said —

"Margaret, I should like you to know something of what I know myself of this young woman; it will give you a greater interest in her, and it is no secret."

"Not under the seal of the confessional," replied Margaret, trying to give her attention, and recall the thoughts which had been dwelling upon dangerous subjects.

"Yet my first real knowledge arose from a confession," replied Mr. Sutherland; "but you shall hear. I saw her first about five months since; she had then just come back from service in a bad state of health. Change was recommended, and it was thought it might do her good to stay here with the farmer, who is her uncle, and his wife. They were her nearest relations, for her parents have been dead two or three years. I heard of her, but did not know her state, until I was sent for suddenly one day to see her. They told me she was dying; but that was one of the common exaggerations in such cases. I found her very ill; yet there was every prospect of her lingering on for months, and she herself seemed to have no idea that she was at all near her end. She was remarkably quiet in manner, but her spirits, I could see, were very much depressed. She seemed to be very well disposed, and talked to me without hesitation upon religious subjects, and was pleased when I offered to read to, and pray with her. Her aunt's account of her was, that she was very silent, but grateful for all that was done; and I learnt that this had been her general character, as far as it was known in the village; but she was not a native of the place."

"That is like Rhoda," said Margaret.

"I think it must be. In other points I can imagine a still greater resemblance. This poor girl, Esther Stevens, would scarcely have been so interesting at first to you, though I own

she was to me. I fancied I perceived traces of a superior intellect and disposition; and her very quietness gave me an additional reason for wishing to know more of her; and I managed it at last. I had visited her for a short time, and found her always glad to see me, and willing to listen to whatever I said, and to do what I advised, except in one instance; she would not receive the Holy Communion. She told me that she had been a communicant formerly; but why she had left off the practice, or why she hesitated, I could not find out. I offered to go through the service with her, and to explain it, thinking there might be some false views which stood in the way. She seemed quite inclined that I should do this,—at least she made no objection; but we never went farther than the first exhortation. When I spoke to her of the difficulties which often stood in people's way, and the necessity of gaining some help in them, by applying to a clergyman, and then went on to urge the importance of confession, when any offence was weighing upon the conscience, and to open the doctrine of the Church upon the subject of absolution, I found that I had touched the vulnerable point. She showed evident agitation, and, after much difficulty, acknowledged that it was the recollection of a particular sin which kept her from the Holy Communion. Now, of course, Margaret," continued Mr. Sutherland, "under ordinary circumstances, an avowal made to a clergyman is strictly secret; but Esther has allowed me to mention this (which is no case of a great crime, such as is generally so called), that it might be a warning to others; and she has, I know, spoken of it herself. It was an act of wilfulness against her mother's advice. She was anxious to go to service, but could not find any place to suit her, when an acquaintance in London proposed that she should accept of a situation which was vacant there. The mother knew very little of the young woman, and dreading her daughter's going into such a scene of temptation, naturally set her face decidedly against it. But Esther was resolved, and, without her mother's knowledge, set off. She offered herself at the place named, and was accepted; and though there were a great many trials, she bore up against them all, and conducted herself extremely well; but the suspense and anxiety caused by her absence worked upon her mother's constitution, which was naturally weak, and brought on a serious illness, from which she never recovered. From that time Esther was miserable, and long thought her offence unpardonable. Yet she had strong religious impressions, and they were her safeguard against many evils. She did at last bring herself sometimes to

hope for forgiveness; but she could never persuade herself that she was worthy to receive the Holy Communion, though it was a blessing which, of all others, she desired; and she might even have died without, if I had not brought her to confession, and, as a consequence, seeing that she was thoroughly penitent, to absolution also. Since then, you may imagine, she has depended upon me in no ordinary manner. If I had allowed it, she would have put herself into my hands to be guided implicitly."

"But that you would not allow?" said Margaret, half-inquiringly.

"No, because I am sure it is not right, and was never intended. To possess such unlimited control over any human being implies a degree of knowledge of the heart which it is not in the power of one person in a thousand to attain; and which, if attained, can scarcely be exercised without great danger to both parties. Guidance and instruction I gave to the utmost; but when I found that Esther was willing to consult me in everything, I imperceptibly drew back, and threw her more upon herself, and managed even for her to be sent away for a little time to another relation. I think now she looks to me as much, and no more, than she ought."

Mr. Sutherland had scarcely finished speaking, when they stood before the gate leading into the smooth plot of grass, surrounded by a low stone wall, which fronted the farm-house. Mr. Sutherland's approach had been perceived, and Margaret was pleased at the cordial feeling which welcomed him. He seemed as much at home now in questions of the dairy and the pigs, as in matters of Scripture and Church history with the school children; and Margaret could not detect any symptoms of absence of mind, even when Mrs. Stevens entered most particularly into the details of her domestic economy. Yet he stopped her, as soon as he could, consistently with kindness, and turned the conversation to her niece. Margaret knew all the fearful symptoms by heart. If she had closed her eyes, and carried back her memory to other scenes, she could almost have supposed that she was listening to the history of poor Rhoda's sufferings.

"You will see her now, sir, I suppose?" said the farmer's wife, when Mr. Sutherland inquired whether Esther was in the next room. "She is not down stairs to-day, her cough is so troublesome."

"I will ask her if she would like you to go up, Margaret," said Mr. Sutherland. "I dare say she will; as it rather pleases her to see people."

He left the room with Mrs. Stevens, and Margaret amused herself with the prints hanging on the wall, and the mixture of ancient simplicity, and modern finery, which is perceptible in many of our English farm-houses. She thought of her uncle's conversation; it seemed as if it had been specially intended for her benefit; to settle her mind. Probably it was, for he seldom spoke without some motive, and Margaret was grateful to him, though she could not yet satisfy herself that very minute direction in matters of conduct was likely to prove an evil rather than a good. It was some time before the farmer's wife re-appeared, and then she said that Mr. Sutherland was going to read to her niece, and had begged her in the mean time to take Miss Percival round the garden. Margaret heard the earnest solemn tones of her uncle's voice in the room above, and a casual remark which she made, in consequence, brought a full history of all his kindness and goodness from her companion. It was no surprise to hear Mr. Sutherland mentioned with gratitude; but Margaret was not prepared for the little instances of consideration which were brought forward; the thoughtfulness which could attend to the very least particulars for the poor girl's comfort. Yet all was nothing, Mrs. Stevens said, when compared with the comfort he had been to her niece's mind. After talking to him, she seemed like a different creature.

"Clergymen take a great deal of pains in these days, ma'am," was her concluding remark, as she led the way back to the house, after exhibiting all that she considered worthy of notice in the garden and farm-yard.

Margaret was not able to enter farther into the merits of the clergy, for Mr. Sutherland came to take her up-stairs; but there was an impression left upon her mind—one which could never have been made at Deering. It was a large airy room which Margaret entered, lighted by latticed windows, looking into the square garden. The walls were whitewashed, and the floor was uncarpeted; but the few articles of furniture; a four-post bed, an old carved oak chest and table, some high-backed chairs, and a cumbrous sofa covered with white dimity, gave it an appearance of comfort. The sick girl herself was cheerful, and seemed better than Margaret had expected. She was very different from Rhoda, older and more subdued, with a quiet intelligent eye, and a very gentle expression of the mouth. She had not yet reached the most distressing stage of her complaint, and the little excitement of seeing Margaret and Mr. Sutherland had made her eyes sparkle with pleasure. Margaret could scarcely believe how ill she was,

even when she put the ordinary questions, and received answers, which she had learned to interpret fatally; but Mr. Sutherland's manner showed a full persuasion of her danger, and Esther alluded to her own state in a tone which admitted no doubt of her conviction that death was inevitable. The scene was not what Margaret had imagined. It was more bright and hopeful; more suited to the flowers which ornamented the mantelpiece, and the gladdening sounds of the birds that were singing in the garden, and the insects which buzzed upon the window. A little round table stood by the sofa, and upon it rested the Bible, from which Mr. Sutherland had been reading, open at the fourteenth chapter of the Gospel of St. John. Esther pointed to it as Mr. Sutherland rose, and said he would leave his niece with her.

"I shall read it over again, sir, when you are gone," she remarked, with a smile of peculiar sweetness.

"You will find comfort in it, I am sure," he replied; "and it will interest you, if you are able to find out the passages in which Heaven is spoken of, and put them together, and so form some more certain idea, if possible, than you now have."

An expression of great awe stole over the countenance of the dying girl; and when Mr. Sutherland took her hand, and gave her his parting blessing, she said, —

"And you really think that I may hope for it?"

"Hope is our duty, Esther, as well as our blessing, when it is a hope rightly founded. If the dark hour, as you call it, comes again, turn to the texts which I have marked, and remember that we have every reason to put faith in our Lord's promise, that the pardon which is granted by His ministers here, upon true repentance, is confirmed by Him in heaven."

Esther retained his hand for a moment, whilst she thanked him for this and his many kindnesses, and with a slight blush offered him a few flowers which she said had been gathered on purpose for him, because they were his favourites. Margaret wished that her uncle had remained, for she could not quite overcome her natural shyness at being left alone with a stranger; but illness soon breaks down the barrier of reserve, and Mr. Sutherland's niece came with a passport to the sick girl's heart, which made her receive every word of sympathy with more than common thankfulness. It seemed a pleasure to be able to tell of his goodness, and Margaret led her on by degrees to speak of herself. The cloud which had previously settled upon her when Mr. Sutherland was taking his leave, returned again as Margaret alluded to the tremendous change that awaits every human being, and

remarked how difficult it was to conceive really what the near approach of such an hour must be. She covered her eyes for a moment, and Margaret thought that she trembled ; but when she looked up, her face was tranquil as before.

"You will be happier than I can be, Miss Percival," she said, earnestly; "for you can never have all to answer for which I have."

"It will be fearful for the best," replied Margaret; "May God have mercy on us both!"

"And He will have mercy," continued Esther: "it is written in the Bible, as Mr. Sutherland has taught me to see; and that is what I rest upon, when I am frightened."

"And are you often frightened?" asked Margaret, without hesitation.

"Sometimes, now. At one time I was always ; but I have been led to think about our Lord and all His sufferings, and that they were borne to save us ; and I can trust to Him ; and when I have no faith, I pray and read of Him, and my fear goes away. But I have been very wicked."

"And you are going to do as my uncle advised," she said, "put together the passages which speak of Heaven?"

"Mr. Sutherland thinks it will be a good thing," replied Esther. "He says I shall understand better then what a great difference there is between the trouble here, and the rest there."

"Yes," said Margaret; "we cannot well feel now, what it will be to be at rest."

"I can feel it a little, I hope, Miss Percival. Perhaps you will, when you come to be as near your end as I am. It is the thought of our Saviour which gives it. I can hope now, and the pain I have to bear seems not like a punishment; but like mercy, because it was what our Saviour had to bear too."

"I have had very little pain of body," said Margaret, "and I am afraid I should find it very difficult to be patient."

"Not with the Bible," replied Esther, drawing the book towards her, and turning to the concluding chapters of one of the Gospels. "That is what I make my aunt, or one of her children read to me," she said, "when I am worst; and sometimes the pain itself makes me happy; it is like sharing a friend's troubles. He is my friend," she added, clasping her wasted hands, "for He has sent me all I need."

Margaret's eyes glistened, and a pang of conscience suggested the question, whether she had ever realised as fully the actual fellowship with her Lord and Master, which could thus make all

suffering light for His sake. Her uncle's voice summoned her down stairs, and the poor girl seemed disappointed; especially so, when she learnt that Margaret would not now remain at Alton.

"It was very kind in any one," she said, "to come and see a sick girl like her, and very nice to have a visit from any friend of Mr. Sutherland's. I hope you will pray for me, Miss Percival, that I may love my Saviour as I ought," were her last words; "and may He bless you, and make you happy!"

Margaret rejoined her uncle, and walked home in silence. She was thinking, not of him, nor of the dying girl, nor even of herself; but of One — "holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens, who is able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him."

Margaret enjoyed that evening a sense of confidence and security in the Church of her fathers, to which for months she had been a stranger. She had now actually seen what before seemed only a theory; and although Mr. Sutherland's arguments as to the guilt of schism could, in strict truth, neither be strengthened nor lessened by the working of the Church, Margaret was still too much under the influence of imagination to be insensible to that which she saw around her. If she had continued at Deering, there might have been seasons when the temptations of Romanism would have been almost more than she could withstand. But there was now a safeguard provided. Whatever might be the power of the Romish Church, it was certain that the English Church possessed power also. Holiness could be met by holiness; zeal by zeal; self-denial by self-denial; and this not in one place only, but wherever the principles of the Church were carried out. And when the tone of mind which such principles were calculated to produce, was sought, it was found in the penitence, and faith, and love which had been witnessed in the suffering girl whose life seemed already hidden with her Lord. To follow Him, to trust in Him, to rejoice in being a partaker of His cross here, in the hope of receiving the fulness of His joy hereafter: could there be a higher motive for action, or a surer support in affliction?

On the succeeding day, and in the quietness of the early morning, Margaret, one of a very small congregation, received the Holy Communion from her uncle's hands. How deep and fervent was the vow then made against yielding to temptation, the eye of God alone could see; but Mr. Sutherland, as he watched the tone of Margaret's conversation in the hours which followed — its quiet cheerfulness, charity, hopefulness, and humility — saw reason to trust that the reward of her great sacrifice had, at length, been

in some measure granted; and that her hitherto wavering faith was strengthened to meet whatever trials might still be in store for her.

CHAPTER LXXVIII.

MARGARET'S life of tranquillity was to end the next day; but she could think of this with comparatively little regret, in the prospect of soon returning to remain at Alton for weeks, possibly even for years. If she could have contemplated the latter as a probability, the change in her life would have been robbed of more than half its sorrow. A residence in her uncle's parish, in the enjoyment of Church services and privileges, with occupation at home amongst the children, and abroad in the parish, offered everything most likely to restore her peace of mind; and had the idea been presented to her before her late experience of grief, she might have called it happiness. Still she trusted no less that in time it might be so, if only she could forget the Countess Novera. But it would not do to speculate upon what might be her lot in after years. At the present moment, all the strength of her mind was required to bear the sacrifice which she was willing to impose upon herself, so as not to allow any one to imagine how great it really was. Margaret found her mother, on her arrival at the Grove, fully engaged. Her own absence had been of use in this respect, for it had obliged Mrs. Percival to resume more of her former habits, and in compliance with Mr. Sutherland's wishes, much had been done to hasten the departure from the Grove. Now that Alton was in a state of preparation, a day or two would enable the whole family to remove there. Margaret was more satisfied with the general prospects when she began to think them over. She believed that her mother would, ere long, recover her cheerfulness, and the children would be happy in any place; and she was learning herself to live in, and for others. If she could see smiles on the countenances of those she loved, she could keep her own sighs hidden from observation. Yet, remarks occasionally fell from her mother, which she would have given much to have been spared. One in particular, on the day of her return, fixed itself in her mind. It was on the disappointment which parents are doomed to meet with in regard to their children's path in life. Margaret perceived, from the look which accompanied it, that, although it was spoken generally, it was meant for her. However

she might strive to bear up herself, it seemed impossible to avoid causing her mother vexation, unless she relinquished her plans.

The last day at the Grove was not what might have been expected; in fact it was not a last day, for some of the family would be there frequently again, to give orders; and Margaret was surprised to find how much the previous removal of the furniture mitigated her regret. Half her home seemed gone before her; but there was a parting, which, upon leaving the Grove, would be final. At Alton there would be no associations with Henningsley. How precious these were Margaret could now fully tell. They were brought before her continually; even when most occupied, she could not resist the temptation of lingering at the window from which the hill above the house could be seen. It was possible, just possible, that the Countess might be there. Lucia's report might have been a mistake, or it might have been misunderstood. Whilst remaining so near Henningsley, there seemed a chance that something might bring them together. On the following day they would be quite removed from the opportunity of a casual meeting; and for any other—Margaret endeavoured to persuade herself that she had given up all hope of it. But the faint expectation lingered in her mind, and she indulged it. For this one day it seemed innocent to remember, and even strive to recall by-gone hours. There would be nothing to induce her to do so at Alton; there all would be new, and the past might be as if it had never been. Agatha called in the course of the afternoon. She was quiet in manner, and said very little of herself; and Margaret knew her too well to force the subject. She saw that her sister was subdued, and, perhaps, that was the best state of mind in which she could be. Cheerfulness would, under the circumstances, have been misplaced. They bade each other good-bye with the expressed hope of still being frequently together. Agatha's pride would not venture an allusion to Margaret's plans, and Margaret carefully abstained from mentioning them, except that once, when Agatha wished that she had the means of doing all which Colonel Clive might do, Margaret stopped her, and said that if it had been possible for her to have undertaken such a serious charge as George's college education, they would at once have applied to her; but with regard to Colonel Clive, she would agree with them, that it would be unfair, in fact, impossible, to expect it; the obligation, if incurred, could not be repaid. Margaret hoped by the remark to put an end to any notion which Agatha might have of appealing to her husband in favour of George; but Agatha had never really entertained the

thought. She had had more experience with Colonel Clive in money affairs than Margaret, and knew well that they were forbidden ground, if she wished to remain at peace with him.

It was late when Agatha left the Grove, and Margaret went then to pay her parting visit to Miss Debrett; afterwards, she thought that it might be allowable to walk on a little way on the road to Henningsley; perhaps to the Lodge gate. If it had not been for the idea, retained in spite of herself, that the Countess might be there, she would possibly have been tempted to enter the park. The fact could be learnt at the Lodge; but Margaret, upon consideration, did not like to be long absent from her mother. She even questioned whether it would be right to walk at all. But it was for the last time, and she had worked very hard, and Mrs. Percival knew that she was going out, and made no objection; and her conscience being satisfied, she set off.

Miss Debrett's visit was hastened over. It was a sorrowful one. Neither the preparations for the change, nor the occupation of giving orders, nor the cheering prospect of her life at Eastlake, with a kind constant companion, and useful occupation, and other great advantages, could, at the moment, divert her mind from the grief of parting from her dear friends. They were very dear; dearer within the last two years, since Margaret had learnt to practise Christian thoughtfulness, and charity, than they had ever been before. Miss Debrett placed her thin hands upon Margaret's face, and looked steadfastly at her, and said, whilst tears streamed down her cheeks,—"I shall never find any one anywhere like you, my dear."

"Only a great many better and kinder," said Margaret, trying not to be sorrowful also.

"No, my dear, none. You were always ready,—close at hand, and you did not mind the weather. And your mother and the children! poor little pets! you will be sure and send them over by-and-by. I found a little china dog in my closet this afternoon, which I must give to Juliet."

Margaret seized upon the idea, and declared that Juliet would be delighted; and Miss Debrett, pleased with herself for the thought, went on to detail the history of the china dog, and at length grew so interested, that Margaret managed to bring in her last words without causing any violent paroxysm of grief; and they separated with a half promise from Margaret that her mother would see Miss Debrett in the evening, and a hope that they might possibly meet again before she left the Grove the following morning.

Once more at liberty, and wrapt in her own thoughts, Margaret,

as if by instinct, took the road to Henningsley. It was the high road along which she had to pass,—the London road; and carriages and horses, riders and pedestrians, went by in quick succession. One or two of her acquaintances bowed; and Mr. Prior stopped his open phaeton to inquire for the family, and Mr. Harrison alighted for a minute from his horse, to ask if it was really true that they were going the next day. The world was pursuing its ordinary course, and Margaret, to all appearance, went with it. She answered the questions addressed to her, and made inquiries in return; bowed when politeness demanded it, and had her senses sufficiently awake to keep her out of the reach of danger. Yet all the time she was as one walking and acting in a dream. About half a mile from the town, the road to Henningsley branched off to the right. It was then but a little distance to the Lodge, and just beyond was the cottage which had been occupied by Rhoda Newbolt. Margaret looked at her watch, and saw that it was growing late; but she had a longing desire to go on a little further, that she might once more look upon the garden, before which she had stood, almost in fear, when she first visited poor Rhoda; and mark the path which Father Andrea had taken across the park; and recall — but no, Margaret would not recall conversations; even though she then felt strong, she dared not; for she knew that it was tampering with her faith. The cottage was now empty. The flower-beds were overgrown with weeds, and grass grew over the narrow walks. Rhoda's family had left it about six months after her death, and since that time it had not been let. The Countess would not admit any one as her tenant who was not a member of the Romish Church. Margaret beheld in it a type of the desolation which had spread over her own hopes. There was nothing to make her personally regret that the place should be neglected; yet it increased her sadness. She looked over the palings into the park; all was still and deserted. The deer were feeding peacefully under the spreading oaks, fearless of being disturbed by the foot of man; for no sound, even of the wood-cutter's axe, broke upon the mournful silence, and the note of a solitary wood-pigeon alone gave a voice to those memories of years gone by, which filled the quietness of the evening hour. Margaret drew near an opening in the trees at the side of the road, from which the house could be seen. It stood prominently forward in the centre of the park, backed by the dark wooded hill. The stone balustrade which ran along the terrace was clearly marked, for the sunlight was touching the building with golden rays, and the grotesque towers glittered in a flood of light. Margaret was dazzled by their brilliancy; yet

she gazed still. It was hard to look for the last time. A carriage drove down the road; but she did not care to mark it; there was nothing for her at that instant in the whole world, except the remembrance of Beatrice. The sound unexpectedly ceased, and Margaret turned to see the cause. A heavy, rather cumbrous, foreign-looking carriage it was, waiting at the Lodge gate; two servants in livery behind.

Why was Margaret's cheek so deadly pale? and why did she cling to the paling to support herself? The Lodge keeper appeared, and the iron gates were swung open; but before the carriage had entered the park, Margaret had seen Father Andrea's face, as he leant out of the window, and she could almost have imagined that he had seen her. She stood transfixed to the spot; then an impulse of shame made her long to rush away; but her head was giddy, and her limbs trembled. She sat down on the bank, trying to recover herself. The carriage rolled on a little way through the park, and Margaret, without seeing, knew exactly how far it must have gone. Before it could have reached the foot of the hill, on which the house stood, it stopped again. It was but for a minute, however, and Margaret heard the sound grow fainter and fainter, till at length, as the road wound round the other side of the hill, it died completely away. She stood up, intending to walk home; but just as she was moving from the spot, a voice arrested her progress.

"Surely I cannot be mistaken. I have the pleasure of seeing Miss Percival." Father Andrea approached with an air of the deepest respect; but Margaret was so taken by surprise that she could not find words to return the greeting. The confessor went round towards the gate, and as she met him there, he held it open for her to enter. That was not the moment to draw back; but Margaret did hesitate, and Father Andrea perceiving it, quickly explained, as they walked on, the reason of his arrival. "The Countess was with him," he said; "she had been extremely ill,—she was very ill at that time, — but she could not be persuaded to remain longer in London, her anxiety was so great to see Miss Percival."

"To see me!" exclaimed Margaret.

"Yes; do you think it could be otherwise, after my explanation?"

"I did not know you could make one; at least not one which would be satisfactory as regarded the letter," replied Margaret.

"I ought to have written to you," he said; "but my time and thoughts were distressingly occupied; and I believed that the Countess would have seen you before any intelligence could have

reached you from me. I will not, however, waste time in making excuses for myself: I think you will easily overlook any suspense I may have unintentionally caused you; and you have a greater call than this upon your forgiveness." He then related, as briefly as possible, the circumstances of Lucia's temptation, and the act into which she had been betrayed, speaking of it openly, and in strong language of condemnation; yet striving, at the same time, to inculcate charity in the judgment that might be passed upon her by those who had never been exposed to a similar trial.

Margaret was shocked more than indignant. Her mind was, like the Countess's, grieved rather at Lucia's guilt, than her own wrongs. She could not entertain anger towards her, when the first account of her treachery was received at the same time that a way to a reconciliation with Beatrice was opened. She said this to Father Andrea, and he seemed satisfied. He had feared that her strict English sense of honour, her coldness when compared with Lucia's passionate temperament, might lead her to censure more harshly. The word reconciliation he would not allow her to use, except as regarded herself.

"The Countess," he said, "required no reconciliation; when the circumstances connected with their former parting had been explained, all was clear to her. She was then conscious of having been in fault, and sought only for Margaret's forgiveness. A week before she would have been with you," continued the confessor, "but she was taken alarmingly ill. You will find her much altered; very much," he repeated slowly, and more emphatically, as if to prepare Margaret for the interview.

Margaret heard what he said, and in a certain degree, comprehended the sense. She knew that it was something which gave her great pain; but her real thoughts were in another direction. This meeting, which she had so earnestly desired, could not be justified to her conscience, unless it were clearly understood to be the last; and not only the last as regarded their personal intercourse, — that might necessarily be imagined, when she was about to leave the Grove, — but the last communication which they could ever have. Neither message nor letter must from henceforth pass between them. When they had ascended the hill, and Father Andrea was about to open the little gate into the shrubbery which joined the terrace, Margaret stopped him. It was right that he should know her determination beforehand.

"You must hearken to me," she said, "before we go further. you have brought me here with the idea of seeing the Countess; but can you answer for the effect the meeting will have upon her?"

"It will be better than delay. She has been living upon the thoughts of it. Her mind is wound up to a great pitch of excitement, and I could not take upon myself to disappoint her."

He was walking on again; but Margaret prevented him from proceeding. — "I do not think you clearly understand," she said, in a timid voice; "if I see Beatrice once more, it must be only once. It can never be again. I am resolved, as I was when I wrote."

The confessor's countenance slightly darkened; but the tone of his reply was indifferent. "We must talk of this at another time. I can think now only of the Countess's anxiety; and that you may not be hurried, I will send a messenger to the Grove to say that you are here, and the carriage shall take you home by and by."

"But it must wait for me now; indeed, I cannot stay long," exclaimed Margaret, seeing that the confessor's intention evidently was to detain her for the evening.

"We will see," was the answer, in the same indifferent manner; "it shall be entirely as you wish. The carriage shall not be put up until you yourself give the order."

Margaret was secretly annoyed, for it seemed as if Father Andrea doubted the strength of her resolution. Yet she could not retain even that momentary irritation against him, when, as they emerged from the shrubbery upon the elevated terrace, and their eyes rested upon the rich landscape which lay beneath them, bathed in the lustre of the setting sun, he resumed his natural style, and said fervently, as if giving vent to a sudden impulse, — "God is merciful, and would teach us truths at all times. His light falls cloudlessly and gloriously upon the earth, yet it is but the type of that more perfect light which the Church sheds upon her faithful children."

Margaret was startled at this abrupt allusion to a subject upon which she had trusted he would deem it useless again to enter; but Father Andrea's purpose was answered. He had impressed her with the conviction, that, although she might forget religion for an earthly affection, it could never be so with him; and the presence of a constant, deep, unwavering principle of devotion is above all others an instrument of influence over the human mind. They passed in front of the drawing-room window; but the Countess was not there. Her maid met them when they entered the hall, and said that her mistress was in the boudoir. She was very much fatigued, and had wished to be alone; but doubtless she would see Miss Percival. Lauretta looked at Margaret as she

spoke with a smile of satisfaction. The Countess had formerly been cheered and tranquillised by her visits, and so she flattered herself it would be now. Margaret drew back, and made Father Andrea lead the way. The confessor's step was slow, and his manner thoughtful, and he stopped at the head of the staircase, and said again, "You will find her much altered,—and remember, excitement of all kinds must be avoided as much as possible." It was a curious warning to give at such a moment, when he had just brought them together; but it was not without its meaning. He knocked gently at the door of the Countess's apartment, and Margaret withdrew instinctively behind him. The summons was in a moment answered, and the confessor entered alone. Beatrice sprang from the sofa on which she had been compelled from utter exhaustion to lie down, and Margaret's name escaped her lips. The look of disappointment which accompanied the words went to the confessor's heart, and without answering, he signed to Margaret to approach, and then left the room. There was but an instant's delay, and then the Countess's lovely features were lighted up with intensity of pleasure; and as they met in the doorway, the long fervent embrace told that the word reconciliation was neither remembered nor required by either. Margaret's thrill of delight was interrupted by her earnest gaze upon the face she loved. The few weeks of absence had indeed worked a fearful change. Margaret looked but once, and her heart died within her. The Countess saw that she was shocked, and adverted to the weariness of the long journey and immediately recalling the past, and longing to ease the burden upon her heart, she said, "Margaret, you, too, have suffered; can you forgive me?" It was an entreaty which Margaret did not require. She had no consciousness of anything to forgive. Who could behold that bright pure face softly shadowed by the spiritual beauty of a better world, and think of aught but holiness and love? Yet Beatrice insisted that she had much to acknowledge and lament. Hastiness, distrust, pride, she could not be happy until she had confessed it; and the extenuation which was at hand—Lucia's insinuations and treachery, were untouched upon. Margaret listened eagerly, not because she wished to be convinced that the affection of Beatrice was restored, but because each word that was spoken, each smile that passed over her countenance, was light and gladness to her heart. Light—but to be followed only by a deeper darkness. Margaret yielded to this long-desired happiness, whilst the Countess spoke; but when she ended with,—"And now, dearest, let me, if I may, hear

from your own lips the true history of all which Father Andrea has reported," the charm was broken. It was no longer the meeting, but the parting, which was before her. "Oh, Beatrice," she said, "Father Andrea has spared me much, much pain. You must know the trial which lies before us. God give us strength to bear it!"

The Countess looked at her incredulously. "Margaret, you are deceiving yourself," she said. "Your tenderness of conscience is misleading you. In a moment of suffering you may have believed that it was right to turn away from the truth; but that time is over. Now that we have been permitted to meet, and that Father Andrea is here to explain all difficulties, we shall be together, at least for a season, and your scruples will vanish."

"No, Beatrice, impossible! To-morrow I leave my home for ever."

The Countess repeated the word "to-morrow" in a tone of abstraction. She turned to seek for Father Andrea. "It is strange—I never heard," she began, whilst trying to rise, that she might reach the bell.

Margaret saw her weakness, and moved instead; and as she sat down again the Countess caught her hand, and said, in a hollow voice, "Margaret, you cannot be cruel."

"To you!—but, Beatrice, I must not tempt myself."

"Oh! listen, listen, Margaret;" and Beatrice grasped her fingers nervously and eagerly. "I am ignorant and sinful, and cannot teach you; but Father Andrea is wise, wiser than my tongue can tell, and he will prove it all. He can place it beyond doubt. And it is salvation; think, Margaret, think, it is salvation."

Margaret paused, and offered an inward prayer for strength to assist her in the struggle; and before she could reply, the servant was in attendance at the door, and the Countess, in a feeble voice, ordered that the confessor should be requested to come to her immediately. She did not attempt to continue the conversation, and Margaret, unwilling to exhaust her, waited in silence. Father Andrea's step was heard approaching through the long passages, and the Countess listened to it with evident impatience. She would have addressed him as he entered; but turning to Margaret, he said, "Miss Percival, the carriage waits only your orders to be put up."

"Let it go," exclaimed the Countess, in a voice of suppressed agony, whilst she held Margaret's dress, as if fearful that she

would in that moment escape her. Margaret looked at her gratefully and fondly, but her voice and manner were unshaken as she answered —

"Nay, dearest Beatrice, that must not be. If it may be delayed but for a few minutes longer, I must be satisfied."

"Speak to her, father," said the Countess, her voice becoming suddenly quite calm.

"I would speak," replied the confessor, "if I thought that my words would be of any avail; but Miss Percival has, doubtless, already weighed the cost. She knows even as we know of what profit it will be to gain the whole world, and lose her own soul."

"Father," answered Margaret, meekly, — "there is nothing for me to gain, by remaining as I now am, except toil and suffering."

"And the support and affection of your friends, daughter," replied the confessor. "You are mistaken if you imagine that you are deciding in this case without reference to them."

"I am deciding," replied Margaret, "according to the best of my judgment, as far as weakness and ignorance will allow. If affection alone could influence me, God knows where my heart would lead me."

She turned to the Countess, and Beatrice lifted the hand which rested in her lap, and pressed it to her lips. There was silence, and then Father Andrea's voice was heard in the abrupt yet solemn tone which in a moment fixed the attention of his hearers.

"'See, I have set before thee, this day, life and death, and good and evil: therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live.' Daughter, I ask you not to choose but to inquire."

Margaret felt the eager gaze which the Countess fixed upon her, though she did not venture to look at her. "I must not listen to you," she said; "I have been warned: and if I now act in the face of warning, the guilt must be my own."

"And who has dared to warn? Who has shut the gates of the city of truth, and forbidden you to enter?" inquired the confessor, indignantly.

"My uncle, and my own conscience," replied Margaret. "Yes. Beatrice," she added, appealing to the Countess, who, on the mention of Mr. Sutherland, had involuntarily withdrawn her hand; "I have followed him, rather than Father Andrea, because I dare not go out of the way to consult a guide after my own choice. I cannot yet deny that the English Church is a true branch of the Catholic Church. Until that is proved, I am bound to adhere to her."

"And the arguments, which are to show that she is apostate, will never then reach your ear," said Father Andrea.

Margaret's distress was increasing every moment. In the conflict of feeling, her head grew almost bewildered; and the rules, by which Mr. Sutherland had directed her, became uncertain. Father Andrea perceived that he had gained an advantage. "Daughter," he said, "I have no wish to hasten your convictions. If we must part, though I hope to persuade you that parting is unnecessary, let it at least be with the promise, that you will at your leisure consider this subject more carefully. Whatever books you may require for instruction shall be supplied you; and, if I might venture to offer it, my own explanation and advice shall ever be at your service."

"Yes," exclaimed the Countess; "he is right. You will and must inquire; promise it,—oh, Margaret, promise it." There was no reply, and Margaret stood apparently undecided. "Promise it," once more repeated the Countess; but Margaret's thoughts had travelled to Alton, to her uncle, the solemn services of the Church, the self-dedication at the altar, the vow that she would avoid the path of temptation—and she was firm. "Beatrice," she said, "I dare not promise anything. According to the light which is given me so must I act; my first duty is with my own Church."

"Which you accept upon your own authority," said Father Andrea, impatiently.

"No," replied Margaret; "the voice of my teachers is declared to be the voice of antiquity, and I cannot contradict it by the inspired Word of God. In forsaking them, I am told I must risk the guilt of schism."

"You shall not forsake them," replied the Countess, imploringly. "You shall but seek further concerning their authority."

"But not of you, Beatrice, nor of Father Andrea. My guides must be those whom God has appointed me; or, in the weakness of my heart, I may be led into fearful error."

"You are not just to yourself," said the Countess, in a changed tone, which had in it something of severity. "You have no weakness."

"Beatrice," exclaimed Margaret, eagerly, "never did you utter a more mistaken word. Yes, I have a weakness, and even you cannot tell how great it is. It bids me leave my mother, my family, my home, all that has been dear to me, and throw myself within reach of a temptation, against which one, who now stands in the place of a father, has solemnly warned me."

The Countess threw her arms round Margaret's waist, and then rested her head upon her hand in the deepest melancholy.

Father Andrea remained immoveably silent, with his eyes fixed on Margaret, awaiting her next words. She rose from her seat, for she dared not trust her resolution longer.

"Beatrice," she said, and paused. The Countess looked up. There was a wild, wandering expression in her glance. "Beatrice, dearest! It is come at length; we must part."

"Part! who speaks of parting?" and the Countess's head was again buried in her hands.

"To-morrow, I have said, I must leave the home of my childhood," said Margaret. "My life will soon be strange and sorrowful. Will you not sometimes think of me?"

Beatrice glanced at Father Andrea, as if expecting him again to interfere; but Margaret continued quickly—

"There is care and trial before me, dearest Beatrice. It would comfort me to know that you could feel for me. If all things continue in their present state, I may soon be living among strangers, as a dependent, working for my daily bread."

"Never; never!" exclaimed the Countess.

"But it must be; there is no hope, and I do not murmur. My lot has been blest hitherto, and doubtless it will be still. It was not pity that I asked."

"Pity!" said the Countess, raising her brilliant eyes to Margaret's. "Pity for you!"

"Yet I might deserve it. Beatrice, your love for me would make me proud."

"Stay!" said the Countess, in a quick voice; "Margaret, come near, quite near, that I may speak; and as she laid her head back on the pillow, Margaret knelt by her, and kissed her, and smoothed the dark silky hair, which was braided across her pallid brow. "I heard it all before," she said, beginning faintly. "Father Andrea told me; but it will never be. Margaret, I came, I made him bring me, that you may be saved — from that, from everything. They say that I must return, that I cannot live in England; and we will go, — yes we will go together to the bright sunny land, and there we shall be happy once more."

"Daughter," said the confessor, as he marked the rising tones of her sweet voice, "you must trust to me to explain your wishes."

"No," replied the Countess, with greater calmness; "none other but myself, Father. Trust me," and she looked up at him with a meaning smile,—"trust me, I will be careful."

"But indeed, Beatrice, you have misunderstood," replied Mar-

garet, painfully perplexed by the mixture of incoherence and earnestness in the Countess's manner. "It is as I have said; to-morrow I must leave the Grove; and soon I must, if my mother's consent can be obtained, exert myself as a governess for a few years, that I may be enabled to maintain my brother at college. These are the true circumstances; and even if no other causes existed, these alone would be sufficient to separate us."

"To unite us, rather," said the Countess; her eager, hopeful spirit, excited to the utmost by the fever which was burning in her veins. "Margaret, you will go with me. Nay, listen," she continued, observing that Margaret would again have insisted upon the impossibility,—"you will go with me, and it shall be as you will. If your heart is bent upon aiding your brother, it shall be done; better far in Italy than in England. Say but the word."

Margaret still looked perplexed; and Father Andrea, seeing that the Countess had already exerted herself too much, interrupted her before she could proceed.

"The Countess has told you what is really the case," he said. "If you are thus resolved upon sacrificing yourself for your family, an opportunity has offered itself by which you may serve your own views, and be of incalculable comfort to others. Lady Anstruther is going to Italy; but in the winter she will, with the Countess, inhabit the Palazzo Novera. If, although holding the position of the Countess's friend, you would eventually undertake the charge of Lady Anstruther's only child, you would be able to assist your brother to the full extent of your wishes; and the Countess Novera would then be blest, as fully as she can hope to be, for the short remainder of her days."

As Margaret heard these words, it seemed that a veil had suddenly been withdrawn from the dark future of her life; and a prospect, calm, peaceful, full of hope and refreshment, was spread before her. For one moment she saw not the shadow of an objection. It brought relief to her mother's pride; certainty for her brother's prospects; comfort incalculable to herself and Beatrice. The next, came the solemn warning—"Lead us not into temptation." The Countess's face was crimsoned with joyful expectation and anxiety. Both to her and to Father Andrea it was an interval of overpowering suspense, until Margaret spoke,—in tones low and gentle, yet firm, as derived from a power beyond her own.

"Beatrice! dearest of all! Heaven bless you for your love! Yet we must part."

Father Andrea started, and Beatrice turned away her head in deep despair.

"Forgive,—forgive me," exclaimed Margaret. "Miserable you may be, but not like me, for I am the cause of your misery. I have promised, not indeed to a human being, but in the secrecy of my own heart before God, that I will shun the path of temptation. My mind is unfixed, my principles are unsettled. If I go with you, I go where everything that surrounds me will be a snare. Beatrice, I dare not."

The Countess raised herself, and her glassy wandering eye moved restlessly around the room. It rested at length upon Father Andrea. He was standing with his arm leaning upon the mantel-piece in gloomy silence. She beckoned him towards her, and, as he approached, said, "Father, have you no word?"

"When the heart is bent upon error, God alone can soften it," he said; and still and rigid he stood at the foot of the sofa.

The eyes of the unhappy Countess closed for an instant, and Margaret drew near once more to bid farewell. Beatrice sat upright, and looked at her with a fixed, quiet gaze; and as Margaret stooped to kiss her, she said, in a voice, the tones of which thrilled fearfully on the ear,—"I am dying; yes, see!" she held out her long, taper fingers, and touched the lines of her thin wan face. "See, I am dying, and I shall die alone; Father Andrea will love me to the last, but none else. No mother! no sister! Servants to watch me in my last moments.—Margaret, have pity upon me!" and the proud Countess Novera, clasping her hands in agony, threw herself at Margaret's feet. Margaret turned aside in misery, untold, unutterable; but the heart that was uplifted in prayer, was superior even to that fierce trial of human affection. She forced the Countess to rise, and laid her again upon the sofa, whilst in a tone of soothing gentleness, which acted, as if by a magic charm, upon the fevered, exhausted spirit, she said: "Beatrice, we have known the secrets of each other's heart's too well that you should doubt me. If my life could be given for yours, death would be welcome for your sake: but the God who has redeemed us is first with you; first must He also be with me."

The Countess's hand fell powerless by her side, and her head drooped upon the pillow. Father Andrea came forward in alarm. "We must risk no more," he said. "Miss Percival—" but Margaret's meek imploring glance melted the severity of his manner, and he added, "Daughter! this excitement may not continue."

"I will go," said Margaret.

The Countess feebly raised her hand, and her lips quivered.

"Say only that I am forgiven. Beatrice! dearest Beatrice! but one word, to prove that your love is unchanged!"

A faint sad smile, the smile of never-dying affection, lit up the Countess's face;—she attempted to speak, but her voice failed her. Margaret bent over her in silence: yet a ray of peace shone even upon that dark moment. For the last time she pressed her lips upon the Countess's forehead, and then obeying the confessor's signal of impatience, hurried from the room without trusting herself to look once more. Father Andrea followed her into the gallery. He stopped, and Margaret thought he would leave her; but it was only to give an order that Lauretta should instantly go to her mistress; and they went on. No word was spoken by either. At the hall-door the carriage was waiting. Margaret turned to the confessor. "Father! must your blessing be denied to one most miserable?"

His sallow face assumed a death-like hue, and his voice shook. "Daughter! the God of mercy, and the Saviour of the world, bless you, and guide you into all truth!"

He placed her in the carriage. Margaret grasped his hand, unable to articulate a parting word. Father Andrea gazed upon her intently. A foreboding cloud gathered upon his lofty brow, and, returning the pressure with convulsive energy, he exclaimed,—

"Daughter, farewell! oh, let it not be—for ever!"

The fearful warning fell like lead upon Margaret's heart. At a rapid rate the carriage descended the hill; but Margaret was unconscious of its movement; and when again it stopped at the Grove, she was lifted from it insensible.

CHAPTER LXXIX.

THE progress of time is but little observed by the busy world. Each moment comes burdened with its appointed work; yet the object to be accomplished is unperceived, until we are enabled to look back through the length of months and years, and trace the end from the beginning. And so in the course of that healing process, which is mercifully ordained to restore us to cheerfulness after suffering, day by day, as we are carried further from the scene of our trial, the burden upon our heart grows lighter; but

the change is scarcely perceptible, until at last we are permitted to reach a haven of peace, and are startled and even pained to find ourselves once more happy. With the young, this restoration is comparatively soon effected; but it must come in its measure to all; for it is the appointment of God.

We build upon the ruins of our buried joys, as the Italians have built over the ruins of Herculaneum. The lava of time encrusts the scenes that have gone by, and upon it we raise for ourselves new homes, new friends, new hopes, new means of enjoyment. Yet it is not therefore that all which has been has ceased to be. Beneath the brightness of the present hour, the city of the past lies hid; and still in silence and solitude, or even at intervals in the business of life, will memory descend into that quiet world, to wander again through the deserted streets, amid the homes of the absent and the dead.

It was on a soft, misty, tranquil summer morning, that, in the early hours of the hallowed day of rest, Margaret Percival sat by herself in the garden of her mother's cottage, and indulged in a reverie of other days. But a few years had elapsed since, in the misery of a desolate heart. she had parted from the Countess Novera. In that time, how much had been endured of humiliation and self-denial! how much of charity learnt! of resignation practised, and perfected! Margaret could look back now, and acknowledge the hand of mercy which had brought her to the present hour. She could retrace with thankfulness the hours of illness and forced exertion which preceded her departure from the Grove; the dreariness of her new home, whilst her spirit was burdened with grief; the affectionate solicitude of her uncle, and the soothing effect of the Church services; the gradual manner in which her mother had been led to consent to her plan for her brother; the pain which it had occasioned to George, and the self-reproach which it had renewed in Craven: and then the carrying out of the plan itself: the residence amongst strangers in a strange place; the wounded pride, checked by the remembrance that the duty was a sacred one, and of God's appointment; the long struggle before her spirit could be brought entirely into subjection; the frequent trials of patience and temper, and the hope which was uppermost through all. The suffering was at length over. Margaret had gained her end. Her brother's college career had been honourable and distinguished; he had obtained a fellowship, and he was now an ordained minister of the Church of Christ, able to assist Mr. Sutherland as his curate; and Margaret was returned to live again amidst all she loved, and

share the inestimable privileges of the Church in a home of piety and peace.

There was, indeed, much for which to be grateful in external circumstances, but more in her own heart. The growth of a subdued and chastened spirit in her mother, and the ripening of early Christian holiness in the children, were amongst the first of Margaret's outward blessings. Harriet was now all that she could require as a companion; gentle, modest, refined, humble-minded, and exercising an influence over the younger ones which Margaret had scarcely hoped to obtain herself. Craven also had given increased proofs of steadiness of character; and Philip was said to be well-conducted at school. Even in thinking of Agatha, there was some comfort, for she was training into a submission to her husband, though she could not hope for happiness with him. But it was in the blessedness of her own situation, and the peacefulness of her own mind, that Margaret saw most reason to be thankful. On that day, her brother was to officiate, for the first time, in the House of God as a duly ordained minister of His Gospel. Her heart bounded with delight, as she felt that the blessing had been obtained through her instrumentality. Her sacrifice had been the means of George's happiness. Margaret did not wish for grateful expressions, though love and respect were shown in her brother's every word and action. She desired only to behold him a faithful clergyman of the English Church, and then her reward would be obtained.

The English Church! yes, Margaret had now learnt to look to no other. The steady adherence to the line which Mr. Sutherland had marked out, avoiding all controversy, all practices which, without being sanctioned, had a tendency to Romanism, and the carrying out, in private, the principles of the Church, had at length brought its recompense. Margaret was no longer harassed by doubts. She could pray in secret without distraction, and join in public services and holy ordinances, in full confidence that they were the appointed means of grace and salvation. Her life was simple and retired, apparently without any grand object; but she desired no other. She had realised her high calling, as a member of the Catholic Church; and as no earthly honour could add to that dignity, so no earthly humiliation could detract from it. By it all duties were alike ennobled; and whether exerting herself actively for the poor, cheering her mother's loneliness, instructing the children, or studying for the improvement of her own mind, Margaret felt herself labouring for the advancement of Christ's Church, and her highest ambition was satisfied.

The present hour was blest; and in that dream of by-gone days, that sorrowing recollection of the past, there was still a remembrance of mercy.

When Margaret left the Countess Novera, the hope of the future, as connected with her, was a blank; but so it was not allowed to remain. Their intercourse had, indeed, ceased; and Margaret knew herself too well to indulge a wish for its renewal; but she was not left without sympathy, nor even without tidings to cheer her in sadness. Mr. Sutherland was ever ready to listen to and comfort her, by endearing attentions and advice, which joined the gentle tenderness of a woman's tact with the strength and confidence of a man. And he did for her what he did not dare give her permission to do herself. He wrote both to the confessor and Lady Anstruther, and from them obtained information as to the Countess's health, although it was deemed desirable that Beatrice herself should not be agitated by knowing that any direct communication was passing between them. Margaret was comforted in learning that the Countess was not left alone in her journey, as she had feared. Lucia was placed in a convent in England until a better opportunity could be found for her return; and Lady Anstruther then took the care of the dying Countess upon herself.

It was a precious charge; but one that was soon over. The Countess Novera lived but a few weeks after she reached Italy. Father Andrea himself gave the history of the hours which followed that sad return. He told of patience, humility, steadfast faith; all that Margaret most earnestly desired for her own death-bed; and he spoke also, strongly and confidently, of the eternal reward assured to the faithful members of the one true Church. Margaret trembled for a moment, but her heart was not shaken, as it once would have been. She could think of Beatrice as blest, whatever might have been the errors engrafted on her faith, and yet humbly trust that in the English Church she herself might find salvation.

Hope there was for both; hope, that when the veil should be withdrawn, light and peace would await them in the kingdom of immortality. Had it been otherwise, Margaret could little have endured the sight of those treasured remembrances upon which on this day — the calmest, the most fraught with gratitude and hope, of all which she had yet spent, — she gazed with the freshness and fulness of early affection. Before her lay the few tokens of love which the Countess had given her whilst they were together. One other was now added to them. It was a paper

enclosing a soft, silky curl of dark hair, on which Margaret's eyes rested until the tears, which blinded them, prevented her from reading the words that were written, in scarcely legible characters, underneath the date —

"Severed by my own hand. In a few hours truth will be made clear. Margaret! most loved and precious! my last prayer is for you.

"BEATRICE NOVERA."

Earth has many trials, and death is bitter and tremendous; but the faith of Christianity can triumph over all.

On that same morning Margaret knelt before the altar, at which her uncle and her brother stood, as the ministers of the Most High, and from her inmost heart "blessed God's holy name for all His servants departed this life in His faith and fear;" whilst she "offered herself, her soul and body, to be a reasonable, holy, and lively sacrifice to Him," for His service, in the Church and the home which He had appointed her.

The awful rite was over, and Margaret walked alone on the smooth green lawn that fronted the cottage. Mr. Sutherland and George came up to her. George kissed her forehead, and whispered — "Margaret! on earth, it is you whom I must thank for my great happiness."

Margaret's smile was heavenly in its repose; and as Mr. Sutherland drew her arm affectionately within his, she turned to him, and said —

"Happiness to-day for us all. Yet there was a time when I could not have believed that truth and peace were to be found in the English Church."

THE END.

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